THE SHAPING INFLUENCES

Leonard Woolf writes that Virginia Woolf "was intensely interested in things, people, and events and, as her books show, highly sensitive to the atmosphere which surrounded her, whether it was personal, social, or historical."\(^1\) Virginia Woolf herself accepts that "one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions.... there is a pattern hid behind the cotton wool."\(^2\) An understanding of the "atmosphere", "background" or "pattern" to which Virginia Woolf was subject will, therefore, definitely afford us a greater insight into her thought and sensibility and her development as a theoretician of the novel.

Michael Holroyd finds a deep parental impact on Virginia Woolf's sensibility and work. He writes: "From (her father) she had inherited a strong egoism together with a neurotic and demanding conscience; from her mother, a fine, artistic delicacy and sensitivity. These diverse elements were not to be resolved, but waged within her a tangled and exhausting conflict."\(^3\)

Quentin Bell confirms that Virginia Woolf was the "heiress to two very different and in fact opposed traditions."\(^4\) Leslie Stephen, like the other Stephens, was an intellectual and had "built a facade of stern commonsensicality (but) behind it sheltered a quivering bundle of vulnerable feelings."\(^5\) The women on the side of Virginia Woolf's mother, Julia, "were magnificently formed, grave,
noble, majestic, but neither vivacious nor very approachable. Their beauty suggests, and is sometimes associated with, a certain moral grandeur, a certain monumentality of character." In her a mixing of two contrasting elements which can be described as "sense and sensibility, prose and poetry, literature and art, or, more simply, masculine and feminine." 

The foundation of Virginia Woolf's catholic literary taste was laid by her father. Quentin Bell reveals that before she was thirteen Virginia was trying to imitate the novels or at all events the style of Hawthorne. Then about the year 1897 Leslie brought her Hakluyt's *Voyages* from the London Library. Thereafter she modelled herself upon the Elizabethans. Virginia Woolf, Quentin Bell continues, was clearly destined for (Leslie's) profession. He set himself to know her better; he began telling her about the distinguished literary figures of the past whom he had known when he was young. In the year, 1897, Virginia Woolf also read "Cowper's letters... Macaulay and Henry James." In the next few years, like her father, she read "a good deal, mostly 18th century."

However, the period of really rigorous training lay ahead. Sir Leslie Stephen died in February 1904, and his four children, Vanessa, Virginia, Thoby and Adrian left their old house and changed to a new one at 46 Gordon Square. This change was quite symbolic of the changes marking themselves on the intellectual London at that time. The moribund Victorian tradition in literature was breaking up and a spirit of "modernism" stimulated by fresh researches in
science and psychology was stirring. Leonard Woolf who himself was subjected to the pull of these changes writes:

Profound changes were taking place in every direction, not merely politically and socially. The revolution of the motor car and the aeroplane had begun; Freud and Rutherford and Einstein were at work beginning to revolutionize our knowledge of our own minds and of the universe. Equally exciting things were happening in the arts. On the stage the shattering impact of Ibsen was still belatedly powerful and we felt that Ibsen had a worthy successor in Shaw as a revolutionary. In literature one seemed to feel the ominous lull before the storm which was to produce in a few years A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Ulysses, Prufrock and... Jacob's Room... In painting we were in the middle of the profound revolution of Cezanne, Matisse, and Picasso which miraculously followed so closely upon the no less profound revolution of Renoir, Monet, Degas, and Manet. And to crown all, night after night we flocked to Covent Garden, entranced by a new art, a revelation to us benighted English, the Russian Ballet in the greatest days of Diaghilve and Nijinsky. 12

In Bloomsbury, Virginia Woolf writes, the "four of us... decided (to) start life afresh... we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock. Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different." 13

The questions that obviously arise are: what did Bloomsbury stand for? and, what effect did it have on the formation of Virginia Woolf's artistic conscience? From the very beginning, Bloomsbury was going to be interested in the arts, but when Roger Fry joined it in 1910, this interest became passion. In the twenties and the thirties, when some of the members of Bloomsbury, such as, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf became famous, it came to be looked down upon as a coterie of highbrows and aesthetes, and suffered ridicule and rebuke from writers and reviewers, prominent among whom were Arnold Bennett, Wyndham Lewis, Roy Campbell, Frank Swinnerton, F.R. and Q.D. Leavis. To them,
as J.K. Johnstone writes, Bloomsbury meant a number of things—snobbish, highbrow, arty, Bohemian—all rolled into one word.\(^\text{14}\)

Strictly speaking, Bloomsbury never existed in the form ascribed to it though it did comprise something of an atmosphere, a mood, a culture. The individual members always pursued their own taste and saw light in their own judgement. The only thing common about them was that dissatisfied with the contemporary English scene, they turned to France and the previous ages and their urge for novelty and freshness of expression made them mix the different genres. Holroyd observes:

although these friends who met on Thursday evenings before the war shared no fixed and common values germinating from an original gospel, they may be said to have been permeated with similar intuitions. The keystone to these intuitions was a desire for partial independence from the parochial and pretentious fog of Victorianism. They were alike in their determined opposition to the religious and moral standards of Victorian orthodoxy; and in their work they represented more truly than anything else the culmination and ultimate refinement of the aesthetic movement.\(^\text{15}\)

Bloomsbury exercised immense influence on Virginia Woolf right from the initial stages. James Hafley wrongly holds that Virginia Woolf, instead of being an active member, was "simply a gracious hostess to this interesting and variegated group of persons."\(^\text{16}\) She herself records: "From such discussions Vanessa and I got probably much the same pleasure that undergraduates get when they meet friends of their own for the first time. In the world of the Booths and the Maxses we were not asked to use our brains much. Here we used nothing else."\(^\text{17}\)

G.E. Moore, the Cambridge philosopher, was the first
major influence on Bloomsbury. Leonard Woolf writes that Virginia Woolf too was "deeply affected by the astringent influence of Moore." But it is doubtful if Moore made any dent in Virginia Woolf's artistic sensibility. Clive Bell admits Moore's influence on himself and many others, but discounts it on Virginia Woolf. As already noted, Virginia Woolf had listened to and taken part in the discussions about Moore's philosophy, but it was not before 1908 that she read him. She conveyed to Vanessa Bell her understanding and admiration of Moore: "I finished Moore last night... I am not so dumb foundered as I was; but the more I understand, the more I admire. He is so humane in spite of his desire to know the truth." It must, however, be borne in mind that Virginia Woolf was dedicated to aesthetic rather than to philosophic values. Quentin Bell underscores the point that for her "the visual arts were... of the highest importance."

Before we carry our probe into 'influences' further, we may better pause to take note of Virginia Woolf's interest in music. Two phrases "I see", "I hear", are central to her work. Music, besides painting, was an early infatuation that lasted with her till the end and contributed immensely to her aesthetic posture. Nigel Nicolson writes: "With both her mother and half-sister Stella dead... (Virginia Woolf) became increasingly interested in literature and music." Mozart and Beethoven were Virginia Woolf's original passion and Wagner claimed her heart through Saxon Sydney-Turner. The exalted place she assigned to music is evident from her letter to Emma Vaughan written as early as April 23, 1901:
The only thing in this world is music - music and books and one or two pictures. I am going to found a colony where there shall be no marrying - unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven...23

She even read the History of Music in 1904.

The following extracts from her early letters are significant:

beautiful writing is like music often, the wrong notes, and discords and barbarities that one hears generally - and makes too.24

I have been having a debauch of music and hearing certain notes to which I could be wed - pure simple notes - smooth from all passion and frailty, and flawless as gems. That means so much to me ... Now do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?25

We went to Salome, (Strauss, as you may know) last night. I was much excited, and believe that it is a new discovery. He gets great emotion into his music... However, Saxon thought we were encroaching upon Wagner, and we had a long and rather acid discussion. He has an amazing knowledge of detail...26

Virginia Woolf was very sensitive to sound and visual effects; and her sensitivity to visual effects acquired an acuteness on account of her association with Roger Fry with whom she first came into contact in 1910. She writes: "It must have been in 1910 I suppose that Clive one evening rushed upstairs in a state of the highest excitement. He had just had one of the most interesting conversations of his life. It was with Roger Fry. They had been discussing the theory of art for hours. He thought Roger Fry the most interesting person he had met since Cambridge days. So Roger appeared.... He had more knowledge and experience than the rest of us put together."27

Roger Fry at once became the aesthetic mentor of Bloomsbury, and with him on the scene, its mood and character began to change. The perspective now shifted to French art
and literature and English writers too came to be read and interpreted from a new angle which was purely aesthetic. "It was through (Fry), "Writs Quentin Bell, "rather than through Clive Bell, that the group established a close rapport with Paris, the Paris of Matisse, Derain, Picasso... Vildrac. It was through his influence, warmly seconded by Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, and to a lesser extent by Lytton Strachey, that Bloomsbury became, on the whole, francophile. It was certainly in part under his influence that Clive Bell wrote Art (1914)."

Fry exerted the strongest influence on Virginia Woolf's approach to literature. In an hitherto unpublished letter to his daughter, Pamela, Virginia Woolf wrote that Fry "was always the giver - no one excited and stirred me as he did." Her experiments as a novelist, therefore, involve to a significant degree an attempt to apply to the novel the aesthetic theories of Fry.

Fry had discovered Paul Cezanne and his followers whom he labelled Post-Impressionists while studying art in France. Just after becoming a member of Bloomsbury, he startled the British public by introducing them, through a London Exhibition held from November 8, 1910 to January 15, 1911, to Post-Impressionist paintings. The first Exhibition was followed by the second, held from October, 1912 to January, 1913 and included the works of Picasso and Matisse as well.

Post-Impressionism was the reaction against the all-vision and no-design of Impressionism which had begun with Claude Monet's painting entitled Impression. The painting was executed in 1872 but exhibited in 1874. Significantly enough,
Impression itself was the work of a rebel artist and had been rejected by the official Salon. The leading Impressionists, apart from Monet, were Camille Pissarro and Alfred Sisley. Their vision of natural objects and phenomena had been conditioned by the discoveries in Physics about the nature of light and its effects on colours. It may be interesting to note that Monet's pioneering canvas represented the effect of the sun rising over the sea.

Researches in Optics had shown that greater clarity could be gained from tones combined by the eye than from those mixed on the palette. The programme of the Impressionists, therefore, as Frank Jowett Mather, Jr. writes, followed the simple directions: "Make of yourself simply an eye; take in passively the fleeting loveliness of an instant; transfer it to canvas before the vision fades." This method, in a way, lugged the Impressionists with the traditionalists who looked at art as an imitation of life. For instance, Monet's major concern was light and he considered forms only incidental. Working on these lines, he and his followers developed techniques to seize the fleeting vision before it was lost. But their contribution to art was important since their representation of nature was so unusual that ultimately it led to a break with tradition and to "retreat from likeness", a term made famous by Frances B. Blanshard's scholarly study entitled, Retreat from Likeness in the Theory of Painting.

Paul Cezanne started the reaction against Impressionism and was followed vigorously by other notable artists like Georges Seurat, Eugene Henri, Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh and Henri Rousseau. Cezanne, Frances B. Blanshard points
out, was determined to supply the elements which Monet lacked: namely, firm local form, individual expressiveness, and spiritual depth. The Impressionists' principle of painting merely what they saw was also rejected by the Post-Impressionists, and this rejection, pursued to its logical end, meant that fidelity to appearance was really not the measure of art.

Post-Impressionism implied a reconsideration of the very purpose and aim as well as the methods of pictorial and plastic art. Fry, as quoted by Virginia Woolf, observed that Cézanne and the other Post-Impressionists:

'do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form, not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean that they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely-knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact they aim not at illusion but at reality.'

Fry felt that the greatest art was concerned most with the universal aspects of natural forms and was least bothered about particulars. The artist's quest, according to him, was a search for the significant. It is this essential element in art which is termed as "significant form" by Clive Bell.

The two Post-Impressionist exhibitions gave a totally new direction to Bloomsbury and also had a tremendous effect on Virginia Woolf. Quentin Bell testifies:

Virginia was not deeply interested in the Post-Impressionists; but with Roger a constant visitor in Gordon Square she could not ignore the commotion that they caused. The atmosphere engendered by him and by the exhibition made her circle a little more centripetal, a little more conscious of being revolutionary and notorious.... (The) intellectual character of Bloomsbury itself began to change. The doctrines of G.E.Moore no longer seemed quite so important when Cézanne
was the chief topic of conversation, and Lytton Strachey might seem less pre-eminent when compared with Roger Fry.  
Virginia Woolf herself owns the fact that the exhibitions of Post-Impressionist paintings gave a new turn to her aesthetic convictions:

Thursday evenings with their silences and their arguments were a thing of the past. Their place was taken by parties of a very different sort. The Post-Impressionist movement had cast - not its shadow - but its bunch of variegated lights upon us. We bought poinsettias made of scarlet plush; we made dresses of the printed cotton that is specially loved by negroes; we dressed ourselves up as Gauguin pictures and careered round Crosby Hall.

The French art - of Cezanne, Matisse, Gauguin, and Van Gogh - was, in fact, the first tremor of the general upheaval awaiting to overtake European art towards the end of the first decade of this century. About the same time, the German aestheticians Volkelt and Lipps, and the art historian Worringen were laying full stress on the "formal" rather than the "vital" in art. In England, two years before the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, Epstein had unveiled his "Strand Statues" and though, as Sam Hynes writes, he was "roundly condemned as a pornographer by the critics in the public press," his attempt had shown that the rising artists were itching to strike at the academic control. Later, T.E. Hulme, under the influence of Worringen, was to mount a still more virulent attack on the "Renaissance spirit" in the philosophy of art. His attacks reinforced by those of Wyndham Lewis, Bomberg and others led to geometrical art - Vorticism, Cubism, Futurism, etc. All these men and movements in France, Germany and England directed their energy against the conventions and traditions of their time, and stood for a search for new attitudes, new methods, and new forms.
The two Post-Impressionist exhibitions caused an aesthetic revolution. Desmond MacCarthy who was the secretary of the First Exhibition later called it "The Art-Quake of 1910;" and it left so deep a mark on Virginia Woolf that she, in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" published in 1924, claimed, that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed." 

To understand Virginia Woolf better, therefore, we have to know more of Fry. Fry's "An Essay in Aesthetics", reissued in Vision and Design, is treated as the blueprint of his theory of art. The essay contains, among other things, Fry's insistence on the impersonality of the artist and the autonomy of the work of art, the assertion of the existence of a specifically aesthetic emotion, the definition of beauty as the viewer's response to that aesthetic emotion, the assertion that form is the only cause of that emotion, the suggestion that form consists in the viewer's awareness of relations, and the examination of the formal elements of a work of art. He also reiterated therein what he had already written to his mother that "painting is not mere representation of natural objects."

Some more significant events occurred in Fry's life and aesthetics between 1910 and 1912. One such event was that his acquaintance with Byzantine art was renewed and deepened. Fry visited Constantinople with Vanessa and Clive Bell in the spring of 1911. He had seen Byzantine art before in Venice and Ravenna and he had even said that the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition - the "show of modern French art..."
is really the beginning of the return to Byzantine art, yet it was in Constantinople that its force became really apparent. Denys Sutton writes: "The revelation of the beauty of the Byzantine mosaics was of paramount importance for enlarging Fry's vision of art." And in the Byzantine art, Worringer comments, "the whole tendency was... abstract; it sought as far as possible to evade the organic."

Thus, in addition to the French art, Fry developed an enthusiasm for the Byzantine art and acquired an approach to literature which was essentially formalistic. In a letter dated 18th February, 1913, to G.L. Dickinson, he wrote:

I'm continuing my aesthetic theories and have been attacking poetry to understand painting. I want to find out what the function of content is and am developing a theory... that it is merely directive of form and that all the essential aesthetic quality has to do with pure form... (In) proportion as poetry becomes more intense the content is entirely remade by the form and has no separate value at all. You see, the sense of poetry is analogous to the things represented in painting. I admit that there is also a queer kind of hybrid art of sense and illustration, but it can only arouse particular and definitely conditioned emotions, whereas the emotions of music and pure painting and poetry, when it approaches purity, are really free abstract and universal.

Virginia Woolf assimilated Fry's critical ideas as expressed in Vision and Design (1920), Transformations (1926), and Cezanne (1927) and reflected their sap and vigour in her work. In her biography of Roger Fry, she quotes him saying that literature "was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cezanne and Picasso had shown the way; writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit." As John Hawley Roberts writes:

what Cezanne and Picasso did in the art of painting, as explained by Roger Fry, Mrs. Woolf attempted to do in the art of the novel.
Clive Bell is generally discussed after Roger Fry in art criticism. A close literary relationship had existed between him and Virginia Woolf before Roger Fry appeared on the scene. Indeed, The Voyage Out (Melymbrosia) had taken shape under his tutelage. Bell was not an original thinker and is considered as a mere populiser of Fry's theories. Naturally, he was more rigid in the interpretation and application of these theories than Fry himself. Bell succumbed to Cezanne's charm as soon as Fry introduced the great French artist to the English public. His two books - Art and Since Cezanne - did much to explain Post-Impressionism and Fry's art theories, but with a certain rigidity.

Art, for Bell, does not exist outside "significant form." The function of criticism, therefore, is to point out "those parts, the sum, or rather the combination, of which unite to produce significant form." By "significant form" Bell means the "form behind which we catch a sense of ultimate reality." Bell was a purist and wanted every kind of representation from art to be eschewed. The best painting for him is that which relies for its effect solely on formal qualities. Praising Post-Impressionism for freeing art from casual and adventitious interest, he writes:

Like all sound revolutions, Post-Impressionism is nothing more than a return to first principles. Into a world where the painter was expected to be either a photographer or an acrobat burst the Post-Impressionist, claiming that, above all things, he should be an artist. Never mind, said he, about representation or accomplishment... mind about art. Creating a work of art is so tremendous a business that it leaves no leisure for catching a likeness or displaying address. Every sacrifice made to representation is something stolen from art.
There is some gap between the positions held by Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Whereas Bell says that the only appropriate creation of a painter is the abstract, non-representational art, Fry approaches art as creative interpretation of natural forms, revealing the emotion generated by the artist's perception of the real essence of some natural model. Virginia Woolf is nearer to Fry than to Bell. Both in theory and practice, she is neither purely geometrical nor purely photographic.

Marcel Proust was another important figure to contribute to Virginia Woolf's aesthetic convictions. D.S. Mirsky calls Proust the national author of Bloomsbury; and Rose Macaulay recollects that the visitor to Virginia Woolf, "particularly if young or hero-worshipping, had perhaps hoped for a deep, cultured kind of conversation, about books, about art, about life, about Proust."

Proust himself had been greatly influenced by the various scientific and philosophic changes taking place at the opening of this century. His attitude towards space and time, for instance, was affected by the results of the enquiries conducted by philosophers like Henri Bergson and Samuel Alexander and physicists like Albert Einstein into the nature of 'reality'. The philosophers assumed that the basic aspect of 'reality' is space-time; and it is Bergson particularly who, Wyndham Lewis says, "put the hyphen between Space and Time." Bergson thinks that consciousness, matter, time, and evolution are the aspects of duree (consciousness of duration) and duree or time is the real constituent of space. Mind is, in practice, this
very 'duration' because in it time past impinges on time present and both look to time future without being categorised as past, present and future. A man's awareness of 'reality' is, in fact, the state of his mind, at a particular moment, and this in turn is the myriad of impressions during a particular time. This given, 'reality', is an endless becoming, an unceasing flow and flux, and can be perceived and understood only by intuition, and not by the inferior function of intellect. For Alexander, space-time is the matrix from which aspects of 'reality' like matter, life, mind and Deity have emerged. Einstein propounded the theory that many facts of experience like the three dimensional space, time as separate entity, and the time interval between events, are not absolute but relative to the way of looking at them. 'Reality' can no longer be considered as the experience of physical actions, unconnected with the impression produced by these actions in the consciousness. The universe is not the material aspect alone, but with the element of time added to it. With Einstein's theory, Newton's doctrine of an "absolute space that always remains the same by virtue of its own nature, unrelated to outward circumstances, and immovable" became irrelevant. The classification of arts into "spatial" and "temporal" also ceased to be meaningful.

Proust's handling of time is certainly Bergsonian, though the element of retrospection acquires more significance in him than in Bergson. Commenting on Bergson's influence on Proust, Morris Beja writes that "both believe that time cannot stop; they also feel that during certain experiences it can be transcended - largely through memory,
which enables us to live in pure time. And living in this state is, in effect, the same as living outside of time.⁵⁵ Proust, on his part, emphasises not merely the remembrance of things past, but also the "sudden, unexpected, 'involuntary' nature of the memories involved in recapturing the past."⁵⁶ These memories arise from, what Beja calls, "a trivial, apparently irrelevant event,"⁵⁷ but end in becoming moments of vision.

The first volume of Proust's *A Remembrance of Things Past* came out in 1913, and the last in 1928. The story (if there is a story in it) is told through a narrator or hero, but what matters in the book is not events but the remembrance of events. A violin sonata is being performed in Paris and a 'little phrase' from its slow movement catches the ear of Swann and steals into his life. He remembers his love affair; he recalls his acquaintance with the wretched little organist, Vinteuil. After thousands of pages the 'little phrase' recrosses the book, but only as an echo. Another work of Vinteuil who now has become a national glory is being performed. The hero listens, suddenly the little phrase of the sonata recurs, as E.M. Forster puts it, "half-heard, changed, but giving complete orientation, so that he is back in the country of his childhood with the knowledge that it belongs to the unknown. It gives memory a shock, and these shocks and their emotional consequences are Proust's main concern."⁵⁸

Bergson's direct influence on Virginia Woolf is disputable. F. Delattre is among the foremost who attempt to
establish a direct link between Bergson's philosophy and Virginia Woolf's fiction. Jean Guiguet and Morris Beja are among those who go in the opposite direction. Shiv K. Kumar sees only a parallelism between Bergson's and Virginia Woolf's cogitations on time. However, there is no denying the fact that underlying the novels of Virginia Woolf there is a preoccupation with time. After all, she could not but be affected by some of the intellectual currents of her day.

It is through Proust that Bergson attracted Virginia Woolf: she was fascinated by the Proustian manipulation of time. Proust was introduced to her by Roger Fry in 1917. Jean Guiguet is not right when he places the beginning of Virginia Woolf's intellectual contact with Proust in 1922. He writes: "On October 4, 1922, Virginia Woolf finishes Ulysses and begins reading Proust." Quentin Bell informs that in October, 1917, Leonard Woolf founded a club to serve as a meeting place for his socialist friends. But it soon became a centre for the avant-garde in art and literature; and since "painting had had its great explosive flowering in 1910 (it) was the writers who seemed to be just within sight of new possibilities. Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T.S.Eliot and Katherine Mansfield were beginning to be read and discussed; and Roger Fry came back from France with news of an undoubted literary genius... Marcel Proust." Here, it may also be advantageous to quote from Roger Fry's letter dated June 2, 1918, to N.Wedd: "Now as to books - if I can remember my list.... Marcel Proust... A most delightful and quite new kind of thing, but don't be put off by the
beginning. I had to attack it two or three times before I got hold of it - then one is fascinated but it's very hard reading because it's so packed with images and similes - it's like toffee." Can one imagine that Roger Fry did not discuss Marcel Proust with his most intimate friend, Virginia Woolf, in 1918? Virginia Woolf's letter dated 2nd November, 1919 to Fry who was in France answers this question: "O how I want now to write nothing longer than 10 pages for ever! Does Proust come out of it well? Ah, but then he writes French. Please bring him back for me to read."^65

The reference to October 1922 is further falsified by Virginia Woolf's letter dated 6th May, 1922 to Roger Fry: "Proust's fat volume comes in very handy. Last night I started on Vol 2 (Jeunes Filles en Fleurs) of him (the novel) and propose to sink myself in it all day. Scott Moncreiff wants me to say a few words in an album of admiration - will you collaborate? If so, I will: not otherwise."^66

Guiguet is not at fault. The fruits of Quentin Bell's labours were not available to him. He also perhaps had no access to Virginia Woolf's letters. But much weight must not be placed on whether and when Virginia Woolf read Proust, for reading alone does not influence. Debate, discussion and conversation are equally, if not more, effective.

It may also be worthwhile to discuss a few more writers to examine the possibility of some further influences on Virginia Woolf's work, for instance, Samuel Butler, Lytton Strachey, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce.
Guiguet is not able to find any evidence of direct influence of Lytton Strachey on Virginia Woolf, yet he persists that "the presence of Strachey, although diffuse and elusive is none the less constant throughout her work."\(^{67}\) We have already learnt from Quentin Bell that Roger Fry, as soon as he joined Bloomsbury, pushed Lytton Strachey out of Virginia Woolf's literary affections. Moreover, Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* appeared in June, 1918 and *Queen Victoria* in April, 1921, both at a time when not only Virginia Woolf's attention had been engaged by Fry and Proust but her own aesthetic beliefs had started hardening. Strachey was a biographer; and in the art of biography Virginia Woolf had nothing to learn from him. Her *Orlando* is not an exercise in biography, but an essay on Time and is a search for the chimera of 'reality'. Roger Fry clinches the issue. In a letter (written in 1928) to Helen Anrep, he wrote: "Virginia came to tea yesterday and we had a delightful talk about her ideas and what she wanted to do... about Lytton and his idea of Biography, which she doesn't really approve of — she wants the truth and less of an attitude; about the impossibility of knowing the least really about one's fellow creatures even one's nearest friends and about how she knows she makes it all up. That's true..."\(^{68}\)

Guiguet whose concern for Virginia Woolf's originality otherwise borders on fanaticism, engendered one more serious fallacy about her. The fallacy, engendered by him and reared by Allen McLaurin, is Virginia Woolf's "indebtedness" to Samuel Butler. In his preface to the *Contemporary Writers*,
Guiguet remarks that Butler "looms too large in Virginia Woolf's background to be omitted." Catching the hint, McLaurin sets on the trail. He observes: "Virginia Woolf herself testified that Butler was so deeply implanted in her thought that his ideas seemed to be her own. She expressed this indebtedness in a review.... 'The novels that have been fertilized by The Way of All Flesh must by this time constitute a large library, with well-known names upon their backs.'" McLaurin believes that the "sense of the importance of repetition and rhythm" present in Virginia Woolf's work owes much "to the theories of Samuel Butler, one of Virginia Woolf's 'influences.'" Another element, McLaurin supposes Butler to have passed on to Virginia Woolf, is "anti-thesis". He writes: "Butler argues that life itself is irrational and, indeed, based on contradictions. These anti-theses, especially the interpenetration of life and death, are the 'granite and rainbow' of Virginia Woolf's work. The door which keeps swinging open and shut in The Waves is a recurrent image of these opposites and possibly had its germination in (The Note-Books) of Butler."

If Virginia Woolf's personal background is any guide, she became aware of the 'granite and the rainbow' quite in her teens; and life remained a riddle for her till death. Her love of life and its gaiety on the one hand, and her abortive and successful attempts at suicide on the other, are indications enough of the presence of antithetical elements in her being. But our approach to Virginia Woolf is critical, not biographical. So we must bear in mind that repetition,
rhythm and anti-thesis or contrast are some of the essentials of painting and music; and we are yet to be informed if Butler's art is greater than these arts. McLaurin himself writes: "'Rhythm' is an important element in Roger Fry's criticism, and Virginia Woolf's association with him enabled her to enclose her repetitions in a form which parallels his description of visual art, especially that of the Post-Impressionists." That being so, Fry alone would suffice and need not be supplemented with Butler.

Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce are the two important contemporaries of Virginia Woolf. But neither of them played any role in making up her theory of the novel. We may even think that Roger Fry and Marcel Proust provided Virginia Woolf with immunity against them. Rebecca West, Shiv K.Kumar, Jean Guiguet and Leonard Woolf rightly reject the view that Virginia Woolf borrowed anything from Richardson or Joyce.

Rebecca West writes that "the attempts made to show that she derived from other writers – such as Dorothy Richardson – ignore chronology. The tendency to the 'stream of consciousness' technique was general, but she was as early as anyone in applying it." Shiv K.Kumar and Jean Guiguet see a lack of form in the novels of Dorothy Richardson which is an anathema to Virginia Woolf. Shiv K.Kumar writes: "It is necessary to point out at this stage that although Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage has a certain historical importance in the development of the English novel, it pales into insignificance when compared with the novels of Virginia Woolf." Jean Guiguet writes: "if Virginia Woolf recognized
the elder writer's merits, and if... writing of Revolving Lights, she classed her among the pioneers, she was none the less keenly aware of the weaknesses of Dorothy Richardson's novels, despite their merits. Virginia Woolf's review of Dorothy Richardson's The Tunnel, appeared in the "Times Literary Supplement" of 13th February, 1919. Summing up her critique, she said that Dorothy Richardson had left her with a "sense of disappointment."

As regards Joyce, Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell have pointed out that Virginia Woolf first read Ulysses in 1918 and not 1922. We find a marked difference in her feelings about Ulysses between 1918 and 1922. In 1918 she was struck with awe, admiration, envy, and some disgust; in 1922 with total disgust as her entries of 16th August and 6th September, respectively, in the Diary show. The reasons are not far to seek. She published The Mark on the Wall in 1917, Kew Gardens in 1919 and An Unwritten Novel in 1920. The successful method of these experimental short stories had encouraged her to forge a path of her own independently of James Joyce or Dorothy Richardson. Her dissatisfaction with both of them also became apparent during that period as her entry of January 26, 1920 shows:

Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things - that's the doubt; but conceive (?) Mark on the Wall, K.G. and Unwritten Novel taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance two weeks ago. I suppose the danger is the damned egotistical self; which ruins Joyce and Richardson to my mind: is one pliant and rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce and Richardson, narrowing and restricting? My hope is that I've learnt my business sufficiently now to provide all sorts of entertainments.
Anyhow, I must still grope and experiment but this afternoon I had a gleam of light. Indeed, I think from the ease with which I'm developing the *Unwritten Novel* there must be a path for me there.

Virginia Woolf published *Jacob's Room* after she had achieved success with her method as employed in *The Mark on the Wall, Kew Gardens* and *An Unwritten Novel*, and *Jacob's Room* is an impressionistic and not a stream of consciousness novel. *Mrs. Dalloway* followed *Jacob's Room*. While writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf, Quentin Bell discloses, corresponded with Jacques Raverat, the French painter, discussing the relationship between writing and the visual arts. The difficulty about writing, Jacques Raverat wrote to Virginia Woolf, is that it has to be "essentially linear." It is not possible in a sequential narrative to express exactly in the way in which one's mind responds or reacts to an idea or experience, though like a pebble jetted into a pond, "'splashes in the outer air in every direction, and under the surface waves that follow one another into dark and forgotten corners,'" are caused. Virginia Woolf replied to Raverat: "'I rather think You've broached some of the problems of the writers too, who are trying to catch and consolidate and consummate (whatever the word is for making literature) those splashes of yours' (and) (to go beyond the) 'formal railway line of sentence' and to disregard the 'falsity of the past (by which I mean Bennett, Galsworthy and so on)." In other words, like a painter, Virginia Woolf was contemplating to make *Mrs. Dalloway* radial rather than linear.
Virginia Woolf did not rate Joyce high. After reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, she wrote to Clive Bell: "As for Mr. Joyce, I can't see what he's after, though having spent 5/- on him, I did my level best, and was only beaten by the unutterable boredom." Her opinion about *Ulysses* is equally damaging. She wrote to Brenan: "Joyce to me seems strewn with disaster. I can't even see, as you see, his triumphs. A gallant approach, that is all that is obvious to me: then the usual smash and splinters.... The human soul, it seems to me, orientates itself afresh every now and then. It is doing so now. No one can see it whole, therefore. The best of us catch a glimpse of a nose, a shoulder, something turning away, always in movement. Still, it seems better to me to catch this glimpse, than to sit down with Hugh Walpole, Wells, etc., etc., and make large oil paintings of fabulous fleshy monsters complete from top to toe."

The foregoing discussion may end saying that apart from her father, Roger Fry exercised the greatest and the most direct influence on Virginia Woolf's aesthetic evolution. Marcel Proust's was another but only second and minor as compared to Fry's. Strachey, Dorothy Richardson and Joyce were great contemporaries but none of them seemed great enough to Virginia Woolf to inspire her thought and work. At best, she could measure her achievement against theirs and arrive at its merits and weaknesses. In our effort to trace the working of the milieu on Virginia Woolf, it must not, however, be forgotten that the climate of contemporary opinion had its effect on her only because the ground was
already present and prepared in her. Over-emphasis on influences would mean delimiting her achievement. By birth and upbringing, she was detached, sensitive and selective and looked at things from an angle which could reveal their hidden meaning and significance. Besides, writers like her cannot be influenced easily and by every other writer. Moreover, she returned far more than she had received.

REFERENCES


2. Moments of Being, p. 73.


10. Ibid, p. 57.


27. *Moments of Being*, p.175.


32. Ibid, p. 91.


38. *Collected Essays*, 1, p. 320


41. Ibid, p. 338.

42. Denys Sutton. 'Introduction' to *Letters of Roger Fry*, 1, p. 40.


49. Ibid, p.54.

50. Ibid, pp.43-44.


59. Floris Delattre. "La Duree Bergsonienne dans le roman de Virginia Woolf". In Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage, pp.299-300:
This conception of duration, through which Bergson has sought to understand the bases of the immediate self in all their integrity, lies at the heart of Virginia Woolf's novels. She too has placed herself altogether within 'real duration': she has firmly linked psychological experience, the whirling confusion of which she observes with an acute and penetrating eye, with the notion of a continuous 'qualitative and creative' duration, which is simply consciousness itself. She shows especially the unique, unpredictable mental states of her characters, in which there is no recurrence of identical conditions, and no possible prevision of the future. Again, the 'action' in her novels, consisting entirely of an incessant flux of emotional moments, is only... 'a duration in which the past, always in motion, enlarges itself ceaselessly into a present that is also entirely new'; and the reality which she describes is 'a perpetual growth, a creation which is endlessly pursued.'

60. Jean Guiguet. Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p. 33:

Virginia Woolf's contacts (with Bergson) were on the one hand indirect, and on the other, inconsiderable. Leonard Woolf has told me that she had not read Bertrand Russell's The Philosophy of Bergson, the first work published in England about the French philosopher (1914); and he was even doubtful whether she had read her sister-in-law Karin Stephen's The Misuse of Mind (1922)... The dates... argue in favour of this view. Jacob's Room appeared the same year as Karin Stephen's book; Kew Gardens and Monday or Tuesday, which contain in embryo the fundamental principles which the author of The Waves was only to develop further, had come out in 1919 and 1921.

Morris Beja. Epiphany in the Modern Novel, pp. 120-121:

Critics have often attributed Mrs. Woolf's interest in time to the influence of Henri Bergson, although, according to her own testimony, she never read him. A superficial comparison of some of her comments on time with some of Bergson's views might tempt one to believe that she must have been exposed to (his views) indirectly... (But even) if there was an indirect influence - clearly, there was not a direct one - Mrs. Woolf's views on time... are by no means systematic enough to be called Bergsonian and some of them are even 'anti-Bergsonian.'


It is almost certain that (Virginia Woolf) had never read Bergson in the original, nor was she influenced by his philosophy in her style and presentation of la durée and memory. The truth seems to be that her work provides yet another example of parallelism between the stream of consciousness technique and the Bergsonian flux.


64. Roger Fry. *Letters of Roger Fry*, 2, ed. Denys Sutton

65. The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of
Virginia Woolf, 1912-1922, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: The
The Question of Things Happening.


69. Jean Guiguet. 'Preface' to *Contemporary Writers* by

70. Allen McLaurin. *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved*


72. Ibid, p.4.

73. Ibid, p.vii.

74. Rebecca West. In *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*,
p.113.

75. Shiv K. Kumar. *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness*
Novel, p.62.


77. *Contemporary Writers*, p.121.

78. Leonard Woolf. *Downhill All the Way*, p.59:

... it was (in) April 1918 that Virginia read *Ulysses* in
manuscript...
A rather different literary transaction began on 14 April (1918), by which time the Woolfs had returned to Richmond. Miss Harriet Weaver, owner and editor of the Egoist Press, came bearing the manuscript of *Ulysses*; she hoped that the Hogarth Press might publish it. It was a work which Virginia could neither dismiss nor accept. Its power and subtlety were sufficiently evident to arouse her admiration and, no doubt, her envy. It seemed to her to have a kind of beauty but also a kind of cheap, smart, smoking-room coarseness.

80. *Diary*, p.23.


82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.


85. Ibid, p.598.