The novel which, unlike poetry and drama, is a much recent growth has never been a pure genre. Henry Fielding who is generally credited with the establishment of this new species of writing derived the laws of his work from the epic, and not only that, he further crossed them with those of the comedy and the essay. He is meeting the demands of the epic when he begins his narrative in the middle or towards the end of the action and then decides to discontinue it to tell us what had happened before the action had begun. His expositions, elaborations, intrusions, and his habit of devoting an exclusive book or section to an episode are nothing if not epical. Henry James whose work constitutes a watershed between the 'old' and the 'new' novel learnt his technique from drama, especially, tragedy. His 'point of view' which holds the key to the wealth and mystery of his novel has been borrowed from the technique of the drama. But whether Fielding's method is epical or James's dramatic, both remain representational in their delineation of character and event. The only difference between the two is that one is sociological and the other is psychological in his approach.

Virginia Woolf's art, on the other hand, tends towards the non-representational. Her sensibility being nurtured on painting and music, she recast the novel on purely aesthetic lines. Therefore, in order to arrive at her theory of the novel, we must necessarily seek the assistance of these arts.
The time 'philosophy' too which is so important in her work can be interpreted better with reference to painting and music, the significance of the moment and the memory being no where greater than in them.

Contemplating the scope and nature of the novel in the future, Virginia Woolf wrote:

That cannibal, the novel, which has devoured so many forms of art will by then have devoured even more. We shall be forced to invent new names for the different books which masquerade under this one heading. And it is possible that there will be among the so-called novels one which we shall scarcely know how to christen. It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. By what name we are to call it is not a matter of very great importance. What is important is that this book which we see on the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them.¹

The reason why the novel has remained in the past a genre of uncertain status or why its form and function cannot be fixed for the future is attributable directly to the circumstances of its origin. Whereas drama and poetry have had an exalted origin and have come to appeal to the consciousness of the community as a whole, the novel has had a very mundane origin and was created primarily for the entertainment and edification of a particular class - the middle class. Thereafter, whether the novel has remained purely sociological or gone philosophical, psychological or aesthetical, it has always looked to a handful of people for patronage. Virginia Woolf's observation, to "know whom to write for is to know how to write,"² makes the matter explicit.
The search for story, plot and people in Virginia Woolf's novels, in Forster's sense, is not only futile, but also unnecessary. Nor is it possible to divide her novels into the novels of action and the novels of character as Muir divides the novels of others. For a writer who could say (in 1906) that "a thought is worth perhaps twenty dozen deeds," and (in 1908) that "plots don't matter," and again (in 1909): "Oh how I wish I could write a novel! People and their passions, or even their lives without passions," certainly, story, plot and character were not going to be treated in the way these had been treated during the last one hundred and fifty years or so.

Arduous for Form:

*Jacob's Room* marks the beginning of Virginia Woolf's maturity and fame. But behind *Jacob's Room* lies a period of great preparation. The ingredients of the novel, as she intended it to be, were slowly falling into place in her critical imagination. Her solicitude for form amounting to a desire to "re-form" the novel was awakened quite early and continued unabated. She wrote to Elinor Monsell in 1907: "it is a theory of mine that happiness and sorrow are equally good, and beautiful, if you can only find the form for them, because that tickles, supplies, the sense which is above the reach of these accidents."

She wrote to Clive Bell in 1908:

*I think a great deal of my future, and settle what book I am to write - how I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes.*
Quentin Bell has described the various stages in the development of Virginia Woolf's art culminating into a theory. In 1908, Virginia Woolf went to Milan, Pavia, Siena, Perugia and Assisi with Clive and Vanessa Bell. The frescoes in the Collegio del Cambio in Perugia struck her with their strange beauty. She made some notes on them which Quentin Bell reproduces:

'I look at a fresco by Perugino. I conceive that he saw things grouped, contained in certain and invariable forms; expressed in faces, actions - (? which) did not exist; all beauty was contained in the momentary appearance of human beings. He saw it sealed as it were; all its worth in it; not a hint of fear or future. His fresco seems to me infinitely silent; as though beauty had swum up to the top and stayed there, above everything else, speech, paths leading on, relation of brain to brain, don't exist.

Each part has a dependence upon the others; they compose one idea in his mind. That idea has nothing to do with anything that can be put into words. A group stands without relation to the figure of God. They have come together then because their lines and colours are related, and express some view of beauty in his brain.

As for writing - I want to express beauty too - but beauty (symmetry ?) of life and the world, in action. Conflict ? — is that it ? If there is action in painting it is only to exhibit lines; but with the end of beauty in view. Isn't there a different kind of beauty? No conflict.

I attain a different kind of beauty, achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world; achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments; to me this seems the natural process; the flight of the mind. Do they really reach the same thing?'

From the above note we can anticipate Virginia Woolf's aesthetic tilt. She would see "things grouped", eschew "conflict" of action, place emphasis on contemplation showing "the mind's passage through the world," and achieve overall "symmetry by means of infinite discords," that is, there would be "some kind of whole made of ... fragments."
Virginia Woolf's essay, "Modern Fiction", first published in 1919, is generally considered as the manifesto of her novel and is believed to have struck a new note in the theory and practice of the novel. In this essay she questioned the soundness of the method of contemporary novelists and also the adequacy of their equipment. She also finds them wanting in spiritual depth:

Admitting the vagueness which afflicts all criticism of novels, let us hazard the opinion that for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds. So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception. The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn. But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?

Art, Virginia Woolf believes, must express the artist's experience and express only that which is beyond the reach of accident and change. So she issued guidelines which she herself followed and also enjoined upon other novelists to follow. The essay (Modern Fiction) dwells in impressionist terminology on the relationship of content and form. The experiments of Virginia Woolf, indeed, express in different
ways the problem of form. Form was the *sine qua non* of Roger Fry's and Clive Bell's art, and equally so of Virginia Woolf's. Quentin Bell states their position in this respect with greater pungency:

the tendency of the Bloomsbury art critics was to look away from content altogether. It is a tendency better exemplified by Clive Bell than by Roger Fry... But undoubtedly the main tendency of their writings between, say, 1910 and 1925 is in the direction of a purely formalist attitude. The aesthetic emotion is ... something of almost virgin purity, a matter of harmonious relationships, of calculated patterning, entirely removed from the emotive feelings; and these, when they do occur in works of art, are not only irrelevant and 'literary' but productive of that vulgarity, sentimentality and rhetoric which is the besetting sin of nineteenth-century art.12

Roger Fry's letter to Marie Mauron on the relationship of content and form is classic: "It's all the same to me if I represent a Christ or a saucepan since it's the form, and not the object itself, that interests me."13 The necessity of form, he wrote, arises because "effects are much more fleeting and it is only form that remains."14

Since Virginia Woolf's notion of form is derived from the autonomous arts of painting and music, she very much desires that the novel should strive for the condition of these arts. Form in any work, she conceives, is a combination of certain right and necessary elements; and this combination must be aesthetically satisfying. She clarifies the meaning and purpose of form in the novel when she writes:

when we speak of form we mean that certain emotions have been placed in the right relations to each other; then that the novelist is able to dispose these emotions and make them tell by methods which he inherits, bends to his purpose, models anew, or even invents for himself. Further, that the reader can detect these devices, and by so doing will deepen his understanding of the book. While, for the rest, it may be expected that novels will lose their chaos and become
more and more shapely as the novelist explores and perfects his technique. 15

But she complains that "there is not a critic alive now who will say that a novel is a work of art and that as such he will judge it." 16 Yet she hopes that the novel "will become, more than at present, a work of art like any other." 17 Her own novels will go along, what she calls, "uncharted ways in search of new forms for our new sensations." 18

She admits that of all the artists, the novelist is closest to life. Every taste, sound, movement and gesture leaves its immediate impress on him. He sees people smile and hears them weep in person. He watches thousands of hues of lights and shades. He is subject to a million rages and affections. But the novelist, she advises, must select from the multitude of his impressions and experiences and give them a form so that a work of art can emerge out of them:

But if... sensibility is one of the conditions of the novelist's life, it is obvious that all writers whose books survive have known how to master it and make it serve their purposes. They have finished the wine and paid the bill and gone off, alone, into some solitary room where, with toil and pause, in agony (like Flaubert), with struggle and rush, tumultuously (like Dostoevsky) they have mastered their perceptions, hardened them, and changed them into the fabrics of their art. 19

Any work which is born out of indiscriminate impressions and to which the principle of selection has not been applied, Virginia Woolf says, is foredoomed:

The novelist, then, who is a slave to life and concocts his books out of the froth of the moment is doing something difficult, something which pleases, something which, if you have a mind that way, may even instruct. But his work passes as the year 1921 passes, as fox-trots pass, and in three years' time looks as dowdy and dull as any other fashion which has served its turn and gone its way. 20
In a way, she prescribes not only the contents but also the contours of her novel when she writes that it is very necessary for a writer to have a logical imagination in order to exercise a tight control over his material. He must be able to master his perspective:

Tumult is vile; confusion is hateful; everything in a work of art should be mastered and ordered. His effort will be to generalize and split up. Instead of enumerating details he will mould blocks. His characters thus will have a dramatic power which the minutely realized characters of contemporary fiction often sacrifice in the interests of psychology. And then, though this is scarcely visible, so far distant it lies on the rim of the horizon - one can imagine that he will have extended the scope of his interest so as to dramatize some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist - the power of music, the stimulus of sight, the effect on us of the shape of trees or the play of colour, the emotions bred in us by crowds, the obscure terrors and hatreds which come so irrationally in certain places or from certain people, the delight of movement, the intoxication of wine.21

We have noted Virginia Woolf's desire to "re-form" the novel which means abandonment of the traditional pattern of structuring story, plot and character. Following Aristotle, Henry Fielding saw action as a movement in time. So we see him structuring an action with a beginning, a middle, and an end; and an action in him unfolds in a definite direction marked by definite stages. It is this chronological factor which is at the back of E.M. Forster's definition of story as a "narrative of events arranged in their time sequence - dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on."22 Forster, in fact, still clings to traditional aesthetics since he conceives of the novel as purely temporal and of time as essentially linear. But, as already pointed out, Newtonian categories of absolute space and absolute time having been discarded, the division
of arts into purely temporal and purely spatial has become utterly hypothetical. William Fleming, while discussing this point, writes:

It is customary to divide the arts into two main classifications on the basis of space and time... if we classify (them) according to Newton's concepts... There can be no overlapping of frontiers. But it will readily be seen that this is impossible in the case of the so-called temporal arts. The dance, drama, moving picture, all involve the spatial dimension directly. Even literature while unfolding in the temporal sense, constantly infers space through word symbols and concepts... (yet) we are dwelling... in a categorical world which no longer exists. Time and movement are inextricably interwoven, since all time is measured by movement and change of relative positions, and all mobility has, of necessity, duration. Hence the degree of mobility can serve as a criterion for another type of classification.23

Fleming adds:

First of all, music depends for its existence and its transmission from mind to mind upon vibrations in the air which most assuredly have to do with space.... Further, through the elements of dynamics, music is able to suggest processional and recessional effects, and through variations in the softness and loudness, the effect of distance and proximity is attained. Thus the spatial dimension is by no means foreign to the tonal art, while the use of space in the dance, the movie, drama, and literature are all quite obvious.24

It may be repeated that all forms of art are directly related to the aesthetic climate in which they are created. Joseph Frank remarks that "modern literature, as exemplified by such writers as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, is moving in the direction of spatial form... All these writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence."25 To this list, we must add Virginia Woolf since her novel too comes from the matrix of space-time. This will make it possible to have a more dynamic conception of her novels and will also present them as they are- a catch
of live moments netted from the stream of experience. All these writers handle in their work the problems of the immediacy, the newness, and at the same time the repetition of experience. Time in their novels is no longer the historical time and does not always flow, as in the novels of Fielding or Dickens, horizontally. They experience and treat time in depth and breadth since they believe that a man hears, sees, feels, remembers at exactly the same moment.

It is out of this complex of space-time that Virginia Woolf evolves her conception of 'reality' and the form of her novel. The nature of her experience was such as could neither be contained nor expressed by the category of pure time or pure space. Besides, her life-long association with painters and her deep love and understanding of music made her intensely aware of the possibilities of new forms in literature. Her mature novels like *Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves, Between the Acts* have a form acquired from painting and music.

**The Moment - Story, Plot and Character:**

Chronology of time and sequence of one thing following another having become false, novelists like Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf came to place emphasis on the moment, that is, the presentness of things past, present, and future. The problems which the writers of the twenties, indeed, faced were barriers to communication resulting from disintegration of social and cultural values. "It is an age of fragments," Virginia Woolf writes, and she reflects
this fragmentation in her work.

However, the literary function of the moment, so far as Virginia Woolf is concerned, is great: it tends towards the characteristics of poetry, painting and music rather than prose, thereby contributing to the non-representational form of her novels. The moment serves as a 'distillation.' In "A Letter to a Young Poet," she says that the poet's way of portrayal is "not spun out at length in the novelist's way, but condensed and synthesized." Condensation is a part of her aesthetics.

Virginia Woolf was not much of a storyteller or a plotmaker because she did not believe that stories or plots were true. She relied more on her own sensing of life and her emotional reactions to it. In the four novels to be considered, we find her constant regard for the sensing of life vis-a-vis the bodily sensations preceded by emotional reactions to them. Ralph Freedman furnishes a very perceptive analysis of this aspect in her. He writes:

The moment emerges as Virginia Woolf's key to her theory of apprehension as well as to her concepts of poetry and the novel. The moment is the artist's awareness of significant conjunctions between his private sensibility and appropriate facts in the outer world. As a mental act, the moment is indeed internal, but it does not reduce experience to private images alone. Rather, it consists of an analysis of the act of consciousness into its components, i.e., mental awareness and the objects of awareness. Thus, the moment also includes the mind's relations with a multitude of facts. The facts, however, do not belong to the moment due to haphazard accidents of time and space - described by that 'appalling narrative business of the realist: getting from lunch to dinner' - but by virtue of an artist's significant apprehension. Pure poets select too severely... The rendering of the 'moment' as an act of awareness, and its distillation in poetry or fiction, solve the dilemma of ellipsism by compelling the
self to come to terms with the objects of its world. At the same time... it liberates the novelist from photographic realism by allowing him to fashion novels of facts and manners, as well as of inner experience, in a lyrical form.  

Virginia Woolf did not see life connected with series of events and then moving towards a denouement. Her subject, always, is life as lived in the present, and not the adventures of certain personalities spread over a span of years. Human experience, she believes, is marked by continuity and repetition and not by finish and fixity; and it is only the moment which is potent enough to capture or recapture these qualities of experience. The old convention of story, plot and character, therefore, could not express life as Virginia Woolf saw it. Instead, it is the moment with its two attributes of remembrance and anticipation that functions as a structural device in her novels. Morris Beja observes:

In fact, despite her many experiments with widely differing fictional forms, the technical device of the moment of vision appears in all her work, from first to last.... (To) a large extent (moments) determined the character and especially the structure of her novels, as one can see from even a cursory reading of such books as Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse. The attitude toward experience which underlies these and her other works is made explicit in The Waves - which she once thought of calling 'neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper.'

Virginia Woolf, in her review (published on 31st August, 1916) of The Park Wall by Elinor Mordaunt, wrote that "the story is not the important thing." Some years later one of her own characters, Bernard in The Waves, was to muse, "But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through another. And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories." (123-124). There is, Virginia
Woolf thinks, a lack of some commonly-held beliefs about life. So the method of storytelling could never be standardised and a story could never mean the same thing to each and every one. It really signified different things to different people. Moreover, the old method of telling a story in which every event shall follow another was risky because facts, sometimes if not always, could fail a novelist. She writes:

unfortunately, the conditions of storytelling are harsh; they demand that scene shall follow scene; that party shall be supported by another party, one parsonage by another parsonage; that all shall be of the same calibre; that the same values shall prevail. If we are told here that the palace was lit by gas, we must be told there that the manor house was faithful to the oil lamp. But what will happen if, in process of solidifying the entire body of his story, the novelist finds himself out of facts or flagging in his invention? Must he then go on? Yes, for the story has to be finished: the intrigue discovered, the guilty punished, the lovers married in the end. The record, therefore, becomes at times merely a chronicle. Truth peters out into a thin-blooded catalogue.31

In 1927, Virginia Woolf noted that she could "make up situations," but added, "I cannot make up plots. That is: if I pass a lame girl I can, without knowing I do it, instantly make up a scene."32 A situation in her is the exact equivalent of a moment and she makes use of the moment to illustrate a generalisation rather than to describe a particularity. Like the Post-Impressionists, her "situation" consists in selecting a significant element in a scene, then arranging and re-arranging it to give it an aesthetically satisfying form. Moreover, as Davenport points out, because "she wanted to present a true picture of life and to deal with 'an ordinary mind on an ordinary day'; the action of her novels is deliberately sparse and commonplace; the richness
and excitement are to be found in the individual reaction of her characters, in their response to ordinary experience and the meaning of their own lives." Life lacks a plot and does not lend itself to a neat summing up. It is also not susceptible to the sort of treatment, the writers of the realistic fiction gave it. Bernard in The Waves wisely but vexatiously asks: "'But why impose... arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape that and twist up little figures like the toys men sell in trays in the street? Why select this, out of all that — one detail?'" (161).

From Jacob's Room onwards, Virginia Woolf's novels cease to have strong plots in the traditional sense, for events "are seldom important; if we recount them, we do not really believe in them; we have perhaps things of greater interest to say." The things of greater interest, in her opinion, are the inner gloom and glow of man which a novelist, like a painter, should be able to depict in a moment of time. In her essay, "Walter Sickert," she eulogises Sickert, and thereby the art of painting for throwing out the biographical and other irrelevancies:

Sickert is among the best of biographers. When he sits a man or woman down in front of him he sees the whole of the life that has been lived to make that face. There it is — stated. None of our biographers make such complete and flawless statements. They are tripped up by those miserable impediments called facts; was he born on such a day; was his mother's name Jane or Mary; then the affair with the barmaid has to be suppressed out of deference to family feeling; and there is always, brooding over him with its dark wings and hooked beak, the Law of Libel. Hence the three or four hundred pages of compromise, evasion, understatement, overstatement, irrelevance and downright falsehood which we call biography. But Sickert takes his brush, squeezes his tube, looks at the face; and then, cloaked in the divine gift of silence, he paints — lies, paltriness,
splendour, depravity, endurance, beauty - it is all there and nobody can say, 'But his mother's name was Jane not Mary.'

The fact is that the traditional method and material of plot construction do not appeal to Virginia Woolf's concept of the novel. The plots of her own novels too have undergone vast changes in structure and substance. They observe no sequence and do not depend merely on births, law suits, property deals, wars, diseases and deaths. Sequence has made way for simultaneity and repetition which are the facts of life, and the vicarious pleasures of all sorts of catastrophies have yielded place to sensations extracted from the simple and routine activities which people perform daily in their life.

Repetition is one of the essentials of painting and music; and repetition is a special feature of plot construction in Virginia Woolf's novels. It has substituted chronology and sequence as the device for plot construction in Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves and Between the Acts. For instance, there is repetition of experience in Mrs. Dalloway (Septimus Warren Smith's experience repeated in Clarissa Dalloway); repetition in structure in To the Lighthouse, The Waves and Between the Acts (Part one or the first movement repeating itself in the third).

Repetition is also evident from the remembrance of past events by the characters - Clarissa Dalloway's recollection of her girlhood at Bourton in Mrs. Dalloway; Cam's recollection of the stag's head in part I and part III of To the Lighthouse.
The influence of the Post-Impressionists on Virginia Woolf is also discernible in characterisation. Arnold Bennett denigrated her achievement as a novelist because he found her poor in this area. But we have to understand that her theory of story and plot also extends to her conception of character. In his review of *Jacob's Room*, Bennett wrote:

The foundation of good fiction is character creating, and nothing else. The characters must be so fully true that they possess even their own creator.... I think that we have to-day a number of young novelists who display all manner of good qualities - originality of view, ingenuity of presentation, sound common sense, and even style. But they appear to me to be interested more in details than in the full creation of their individual characters. They are so busy with states of society as to half forget that any society consists of individuals, and they attach too much weight to cleverness, which is perhaps the lowest of all artistic qualities.

I have seldom read a cleverer book than Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, a novel which has made a great stir in a small world. It is packed and bursting with originality, and it is exquisitely written. But the characters do not vitally survive in the mind because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness.36

Later on, E.M. Forster, in his Rede lecture, also flung the same stigma at Virginia Woolf, but with his customary suavity:

she could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered, for instance, or Dorothea Casaubon, or Sophia and Constance in *The Old Wives' Tale*.37

Though the trend of Virginia Woolf's novel had become manifest in her essay "Modern Fiction", she gave a full-blooded reply to Bennett with her "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown."

Since significant changes had occurred in all the spheres of life, it would be false for the writers, Virginia Woolf advised, to continue treading in the ruts. The old
theoretical weights and measures had to be thrown away as they could no longer weigh and measure accurately. She wrote:

in or about December, 1910, human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910. The first signs of it are recorded in the books of Samuel Butler. The plays of Bernard Shaw continue to record it. In life one can see the change. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow the 'Daily Herald', now to ask advice about a hat... All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.38

Apart from these material changes, it is the writer's own temperament also that, Virginia Woolf asserts, has to be taken into account because "you see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that."39

'Character' in Virginia Woolf expresses her personal perception of 'reality' about a human being which is quite in keeping with the Post-Impressionist principle. Moreover, her search is not for the material but for the spiritual element in character. She writes: "if... you think of the novels which seem to you great novels — *War and Peace, Vanity Fair, Tristram Shandy, Madame Bovary, Pride and Prejudice, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Villette...* you do at once think of some character who seemed to you so real (I do not by that mean so life-like) that it has the
power to make you think not merely of it itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes - of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in country towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of the soul. H.G.Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett, on the other hand, she complains, "have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there.... But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it." 

Defending Virginia Woolf's characterisation, Vita Sackville-West very perceptively observed:

A common criticism of her novels was that 'she could not portray human beings'... but ... I always thought her genius led her by short cuts to some essential point which everybody else had missed.

The problem of characterisation, in fact, is not to be viewed in isolation, but against the background of many things. Firstly, it is linked with the problem of representation in art. Secondly, the studies in depth psychology had made the solidity of 'character' doubtful. Thirdly, the introduction of the aesthetic of impersonality in literature rendered the judgement by one man of the other totally irrational and uncalled for. Fourthly, the emphasis on the moment of vision gave rise to conviction that any detailed study of 'character' was inessential.

Roger Fry and the Post-Impressionists are notable
for their indifference to verisimilitude in art. Fry almost
summed up his position in "An Essay in Aesthetics," as
quoted by Denys Sutton:

'We may, then, dispense once for all with the idea of
likeness to Nature, of correctness or incorrectness as a
test, and consider only whether the emotional elements
inherent in natural form are adequately discovered, unless,
indeed, the emotional idea depends at any point upon like­
ness or completeness or representation.'

Fry again wrote:

Can we arrive at any conclusions as to the nature of
the graphic arts, which will at all explain our feelings
about them, which will at least put them into some kind of
relation with the other arts, and not leave us in the
extreme perplexity, engendered by any theory of mere
imitation? For, I suppose, it must be admitted that if imitation
is the sole purpose of the graphic arts, it is surprising
that the works of such arts are ever looked upon as more than
curiosities, or ingenious toys, are ever taken seriously
by grown-up people. Moreover, it will be surprising that
they have no recognisable affinity with other arts, such as
music or architecture, in which the imitation of actual
objects is a negligible quantity.

Fry's impact on Virginia Woolf is immense. She is
totally indifferent, even averse, to the idea of likeness
to life. In a letter to C.P. Sanger who had written to her
about her novel, Night and Day, she remarked: "I think one's
readers tend to identify one's characters more than one
does oneself. Of course there are touches of Lady Ritchie
in Mrs. Hilbery; but in writing one gets more and more away
from the reality, and Mrs. Hilbery became to me quite different
from any one in the flesh." When Lytton Strachey criticised
Jacob's Room for the romantic element in it, she replied:
"Of course you put your infallible finger upon the spot -
rromanticism. How do I catch it? ... I think (it) comes from
the effort of breaking with complete representation."
Virginia Woolf was a poet, a painter, and a musician in the garb of a novelist. She constantly felt drawn towards the universal elements in human beings. The particular and the peculiar differences that set one apart from the other did not interest her. The novelist, like the other artists, was under no obligation to recite "the old hackneyed roll-call, chronologically arranged, of inevitable facts in a man's life." She also preferred to view human beings with an aesthetic detachment in the manner of a painter:

To sit cheek by jowl with our fellows cramped up together is distasteful, indeed repulsive. But draw a little apart, see people in groups, as outlines, and they become at once memorable and full of beauty. Then it is not the actual sight or sound itself that matters, but the reverberations that it makes as it travels through our minds. These are often to be found far away, strangely transformed; but it is only by gathering up and putting together these echoes and fragments that we arrive at the true nature of our experience.

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog write that "Western painting and Western literature have both distinguished themselves from much of the world's art by the extent to which they have emphasized the mimetic or representational potential of their forms; and the high tide of relation in both arts seems to have been reached in the later nineteenth century and then begun to recede, the plastic arts since carrying the non-representational to an extent which literature will hardly be likely to match." Virginia Woolf made a matching effort. Her art does not duplicate 'reality' but only suggests an aspect of it. She believes that a novelist's real business should be not to reproduce
actuality but to symbolise some aspect of the human psyche, for this would do well to reveal a man as a whole. She considers that a whole complex of events or emotions can be depicted just by one word. She writes in "Walter Sickert":

painting and writing have much to tell each other: they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see. Gardens, rivers, skies, clouds changing, the colour of a woman's dress, landscapes that bask beneath lovers, twisted woods that people walk in when they quarrel - novels are full of pictures like these. The novelist is always saying to himself how can I bring the sun on to my page? How can I show the night and the moon rising? And he must often think that to describe a scene is the worst way to show it. It must be done with one word, or with one word in skilful contrast with another.50

So the important feature of her theory of characterisation is the denial of fidelity to appearance. This denial is also at the base of the Post-Impressionist revolution the objective of which was to free art from the criterion of conformity to appearance, and what Clive Bell calls, "literary and scientific irrelevancies." Moreover, like Cezanne, Virginia Woolf measured man against nature and denuded him of all the inessentials in order to free him from flux and change. Rhoda says in The Waves:

'I see the sky, softly feathered with its sudden effulgence of moon. I also see the railings of the square, and two people without faces, leaning like statues against the sky. There is, then, a world immune from change.' (91).

The abandonment of linear time by Virginia Woolf also had a tremendous effect on her technique of characterisation. It led to the adoption of the repetitive pattern where repetition takes a triangular form, a form used by the
Post-Impressionists in their maturest works. Discussing the use of this technique even in *The Voyage Out*, Carole O Brown writes that:

the characters... repeat each other; they form groups, examples of marriage, the artist, the academic, the eligible young man.... Out of all this repetition comes a sense of balance, so that the novel imitates something of the geometrical unity of a painting.... Among the characters, for instance, there are pairs: the active Willoughby and the scholarly Ridley, the practical Richard Dalloway and the artistic Helen.... One element is thus poised against another throughout the novel, to achieve an almost visual unity.52

Brown further notes that the "native women Helen and Rachel observe in the village are right out of a Gauguin, 'squatting on the ground in triangular shapes, moving their hands, either plaiting straw or in kneading something in bowls....'"53

The arrangement of characters in triangles is peculiar not only to Gauguin but also to Cézanne. It is because, geometrically, there is greater stability in the triangle. The balancing contrasts in painting and the variable repetitions in music are, indeed, attempts to achieve greater stability and harmony.

In *Jacob's Room*, one triangle is formed by Captain Barfoot, Betty Flanders and Mr.Floyd; the other is formed by Jacob, Timmy Durrant and Bonamy.

In *Mrs.Dalloway*, there are the following triangles:

Peter Walsh - Clarissa Dalloway - Richard Dalloway;
Sally Seton - Peter Walsh - Clarissa Dalloway;
Doris Kilman - Clarissa Dalloway - Elizabeth Dalloway;
Lady Bruton - Richard Dalloway - Hugh Whitbread;
Septimus - Rezia - Evans;
Holmes - Septimus - Bradshaw.

In *To the Lighthouse*, the triangles consist of:
James - Cam - Mr. Ramsay;
Lily Briscoe - Carmichael - Nancy.
Then there is the triangle of two on each side:
Mr. Ramsay - Tansley, Bankes - Rayley, Mrs. Ramsay - Lily Briscoe.

In *The Waves*, there are the two triangles of men and women balancing each other:
Bernard - Neville - Louis;
Susan - Jinny - Rhoda.
Then there is the triangle of two on each side:
Louis - Rhoda, Susan - Bernard, Neville - Jinny.

This triangular combination of characters has a plastic effect, as in Cezanne, instead of possessing representational fidelity.

Virginia Woolf's concept of characterisation was further influenced by the new findings in the field of psychology. Freud was about this time appearing in translation. So were Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy. The ideas of Bergson and William James were already afloat in the air. James's formulations on the nature of the self and his coining of the term "stream of consciousness" were receiving recognition. Never before had the writers been aware to this extent of the role of the subconscious in the thoughts and actions of human beings. Creative writers were feeling delighted as well as appalled at the sight
of the mixed treasures which psychology had revealed. No doubt they got an insight into the buried life and obtained much stuff from it for their work, but the large number of disintegrating forces discovered at play in the subconscious demolished the ancient concept of 'character' as a complete personality. The writers also became more introvert. Mark Schorer describes the situation succinctly:

Under the Freudian scrutiny the best man is only the average man, a Leopold Bloom. 'Soul' as a concept of character has vanished; instead we have the senses, sensuality, and the 'ideals', anything but heroic, which our bruised sensuality construes.

The disappearance of the hero from modern fiction suggests a parallel development — the disappearance of 'character' itself. The new psychology persuades us that human action is a superficial, often a tortured and distorted reflection of personality: and the novel has turned as a result to a kind of characterization which depends on inward rather than outward behaviour.54

No one was more sensitively aware than Virginia Woolf of the constraint the new age imposed on the writers. Some expression of this constraint is found in her depiction of 'character'; even in *Jacob's Room*: "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (146). The problem of delimiting a 'character' is present in Virginia Woolf also because the self is amorphous, fragmentary, and fluid; never fixed. "I'm 20 people," she writes.

In her address given at the opening of the Roger Fry Memorial Exhibition, she said: "A picture was to (Fry) not merely the finished canvas but the canvas in the making."56 That exactly was the case with her; 'character' for her
existed merely in a state of transition. An early entry in her Diary reads: "My only interest as a writer lies, I begin to see, in some queer individuality; not in strength, or passion, or anything startling, but then I say to myself, is not 'some queer individuality' - precisely the quality I respect?" This problem of the self in Virginia Woolf is not only sociological and psychological but also epistemological, and even metaphysical. She writes:

one must become externalised; very, very concentrated, all at one point, not having to draw upon the scattered parts of one's character, living in the brain. Sydney comes and I'm Virginia; when I write I'm merely a sensibility. Sometimes I like being Virginia, but only when I'm scattered and various and gregarious.58

The above mentioned entry means that 'character' for Virginia Woolf does not exist in itself alone but exists in relation to things outside itself. It also expresses her belief that no man or woman is the whole of life but only a part of it. She, therefore, feels that 'character' cannot and should not be specified. In this respect, she identifies herself with Conrad:

Characters are to be merely views: personality must be avoided at all costs. I'm sure my Conrad adventure taught me this. Directly you specify hair, age etc. something frivolous, or irrelevant gets into the book.59

Moreover, the self is amorphous, and it is difficult to know or describe it. Bernard in The Waves says:

'what I call "my life"... is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs' (237).

Clarissa Dalloway in Mrs Dalloway hesitates to sum up people:
She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that... (She) would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that (10-11).

The sense of personal fragmentation also haunts Clarissa Dalloway again and again:

She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was herself — pointed; dart-like; definite. That was herself when some effort, some call on her to be herself, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting — point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps... (42).

Mr. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse is the picture of a man terribly divided. He is a self "concealed" under trite phrases, dons a "disguise," seeks a "refuse," is "afraid to own his own feelings, who could not say. This is what I like — this is what I am" (53). The "wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (72), as Mrs. Ramsay imagines herself to be, is the strongest metaphor which eludes comprehension. The self which is visible swims to the surface but rarely: "This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience... but as a wedge of darkness" (73).

The search for a functional self becomes almost
desperate in *The Waves*. Bernard realises: "'The complexity of things becomes more close... here at College, where the stir and pressure of life are so extreme, where the excitement of mere living becomes daily more urgent.

Every hour something new is unburied in the great bran pie. What am I? I ask. This? No, I am that.... (Then) it becomes clear that I am not one and simple, but complex and many'" (64).

The abundance of aesthetic qualities in Virginia Woolf's poetics of the novel can be gleaned from her sense of detachment from character and event. This sense, no doubt, originates in her interest in the fine arts, but becomes sharper in view of the unfathomable mystery of human identity and communication. Human relationships are a very complex affair and any judgement on each other may not be accurate. Hewet says in *The Voyage Out*: "'One can't come to any decision at all; one's less and less capable of making judgements. D'you find that? And then one never knows what anyone feels. We're all in the dark. We try to find out, but can you imagine anything more ludicrous than one person's opinion of another person? One goes along thinking one knows; but one really doesn't know!'" (220).

Even characters cannot be sure of themselves and of each other, for neither word nor action is to be accepted ad valorem. She writes in *Jacob's Room*: "Some, it is true, take ineffaceable impressions of character at once. Others
dally, loiter, and get blown this way and that. Kind old ladies assure us that cats are often the best judges of character" (146). In Mrs. Dalloway, the situation is more than hopeless. Sally thinks that Clarissa and Richard Dalloway are a happy couple, but after a second of reflection she says: "what can one know even of the people one lives with every day? ... Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult), she often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and women never gave her" (213). In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe thinks of Mrs. Ramsay and wonders: "How then... did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were?" (60). In Between the Acts, Giles Oliver continues to be contemptuous towards William Dodge and pronounces judgement on him, but Isa Oliver declines to do so: "Why judge each other? Do we know each other? Not here, not now" (47).

The emphasis placed by Bergson and Proust on memory structure as a sole source for an individual identity illuminated from a new angle the long-standing relationship between the self and time. For Virginia Woolf who is more vigorously concerned with the very essence of cognition and experience, this relationship is a very vexing one, though, at certain moments, many of her characters, through memory, experience a suspension or cessation of time and thereby attaining to a state of self-realisation. In her development as a theoretician, she moved from a particularly sensitive awareness about the 'I' and the
'thou' to an infinitely complicated horizon of possibilities illumined by the fragmented or multiple self revealed through memory. The real self is revealed by the moment, and not by an arbitrarily extended expanse of time. It is the moment with, what Morris Beja calls, its "total ability to recapture lost sensations" that is pervasive in Virginia Woolf. At the end, Bernard in The Waves tells his dinner companion about a time he and Jinny enjoyed consummation of their love in a brief encounter: "'There was no past, no future; merely the moment in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy'" (217).

Fabric of Vision:

In her essay, "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights," written in 1916, Virginia Woolf expressed her gratitude to Emily Bronte for freeing life from its dependence on facts:

It is as if she could tear up all that we know human beings by, and fill these unrecognizable transparences with such a gust of life that they transcend reality. Hers, then, is the rarest of all powers. She could free life from its dependence on facts; with a few touches indicate the spirit of a face so that it needs no body; by speaking of the moor make the wind blow and the thunder roar.61

The observation serves us well. Virginia Woolf, much before Jacob's Room, had questioned the prevalent notions of 'reality'; and by and by, came to rely less and less on the use of dialogue, description of dress, exactitude of name and place, and idiosyncracies of character which are the hallmark of realistic fiction. All arts are the expression of an urge, not necessity. So she was convinced that the stuff to find place in the novel should comprise
not fact but what one may term anti-fact; rather vision.

The future novel, she says, will:

make little use of the marvellous fact - recording power, which is one of the attributes of fiction. It will tell us very little about the houses, incomes, occupations of its characters; it will have little kinship with the sociological novel or the novel of environment. With these limitations it will express the feeling and ideas of the characters closely and vividly, but from a different angle. It... will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. For under the dominion of the novel we have scrutinized one part of the mind closely and left another unexplored. We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate...

Virginia Woolf's essays, "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" offer heavy challenges to the realistic approach to life in fiction. But a heavier challenge comes in "Phases of Fiction." She expounds that since there does not exist much relationship between what a man feels and what he does, any attempt on the part of the novelist to render an accurate account of a happening would be a mistake. Discussing George Eliot's Silas Marner, she writes: "We shall perceive that often an action has only a slight relation to a feeling and, thus, that the truth-tellers, who are content to record accurately what is said and done are often ludicrously deceived and out in their estimate." However, it is in A Room of One's Own that Virginia Woolf puts the question, "What is meant by 'reality'?" most directly and vehemently, and answers: "It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable - now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying.
It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech - and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly.\textsuperscript{64} We realise that for Virginia Woolf 'reality' consists in not what is obvious and surfacial but in what is suggestive and hidden. She praises Henry James, Dostoevsky, and Proust for the spiritual and psychological depth in their work. She writes that "we have drawn within, and gone exploring with Henry James endless filaments of feeling and relationship in which men and women are enmeshed, and so we have been led on with Dostoevsky to descend miles and miles into the deep and yeasty surges of the soul.... At last Proust... reveals the infinite range and complexity of human sensibility."\textsuperscript{65} Thomas Hardy is also praiseworthy for freeing us "from the cramp and pettiness imposed by life."\textsuperscript{66} She adds that "it is no mere transcript of life at a certain time and place that Hardy has given us. It is a vision of the world and of man's lot as they revealed themselves to a powerful imagination, a profound and poetic genius, a gentle and humane soul."\textsuperscript{67}

The attack on the realistic and naturalistic schools of fiction which Virginia Woolf made, both openly and obliquely, arise from her own sense of values. Throughout her writings her axiological conclusions are quite apparent. Her appreciation of George Meredith for demolishing the scaffolding of facts and her annoyance with H.G.Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy for giving the novels of data, table and index come from this very strata of
personal values. She makes no bones about the latter three novelists and their kin:

For the accuracy of representation, the looseness and simplicity of its method, its denial of artifice and convention, its immense power to imitate the surface reality — all the qualities that make a novel the most popular form of literature — also make it, even as we read it, turn stale and perish on our hands.68

'Reality' for Virginia Woolf resides in the symbolic and not in the apparent. So E.M. Forster too is a failure especially when he presents realistically solid objects and carefully delineated scenes and then suggests some symbolic interpretation and value for them:

He fails, one is tempted to think, chiefly because that admirable gift of his for observation has served him too well. He has recorded too much and too literally. He has given us an almost photographic picture on one side of the page; on the other he asks us to see the same view transformed and radiant with eternal fires.69

To propound her concept of 'reality' and thereby to understand her theory of the novel, Virginia Woolf's view of life has necessarily to be taken into account. It is a part and parcel of her intellectual and emotional belief that life is fluid, fragmentary and incoherent, but underneath this fluidity, fragmentation and incoherence, there lies a stable structure. Jeanne Schulkind writes that Virginia Woolf believed that:

self was an elusive will o' wisp, always just ahead on the horizon, flickering and insubstantial, yet enduring. She believed the individual identity to be always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it: forces which were invisible emerge, others sink silently below the surface, and the past, on which the identity of the present moment rests, is never static, never fixed like a fly in amber, but as subject to alteration as the consciousness that recalls it.70
Schulkind adds that Virginia Woolf's belief that personality is a ceaseless transformation is further evidenced by her "juxtaposition of the present self and the past self." The present and the past interact upon each other and their act of mutual displacement and addition continues uninterrupted.

'Reality', Virginia Woolf writes, also consists in the fact that "one thing follows another and all are swept into a whole." The idea of separate entities, therefore, is a misconception. In The Voyage Out, Terence Hewet wants to combine lights and fireworks into figures:

'What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano, I expect... We want to find out what's behind things, don't we? — Look at the lights down there... scattered about anyhow. Things I feel come to me like lights.... I want to combine them.... Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures?... I want to make figures.... Is that what you want to do?' (221).

Terence's desire 'to find out what's behind things' becomes a matter of search for the meaning of life for others.

"'What is the meaning of life?'" asks Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse (183). The same search for meaning engages Rhoda in The Waves. She fumbles:

"'Like" and "like" and "like" — but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?' (139).

Having abandoned the hot and direct areas of social, religious and sexual interests, Virginia Woolf is free to address herself to the question, "What is real?" and all her characters are found seeking answer to this question, in their own way, of course.
The Novel as Disquisition on Impersonality:

The Aesthetic and the Symbolist movements instilled in the poets and the novelists a new conception of the function of their work and gave a new twist to their position vis-a-vis their work. Henry James and Joseph Conrad brought into the novel an objectivity or sense of impersonality hard to find in the novel of the nineteenth century. The influence of painting and music on the novel further deepened this conception. The sense of impersonality took many shapes as summed up below:

a) Author's neutrality vis-a-vis his characters;
b) Replacement of subjectivity by objectivity in narration;
c) Ignoring the audience and their beliefs;
d) Withdrawal of the author from his work and elimination of his commentary;
e) Introduction of 'Point of View.'

Henry James defines impersonality as "that rounded detachment which enables the perfect work to live by its own life." The idea behind the doctrine of impersonality in the novel is that art requires a suppression of the artist's self. This artistic subordination is a must for the greatness and permanence of a work of art.

With Virginia Woolf, a new form of the novel inheriting the aesthetics of painting and music emerged. She herself possessed what she said a novelist should possess: the "ability to withdraw slightly and see the picture as a whole and reflect upon it." The result is that her novels are just disquisitions on the impersonality of the novelist.
Egotism in art offends her. So the novelist who exhorts, informs or denounces does not meet her approval. A writer may himself be affected by his "private joys and sorrows" but he should have "no gospel to preach and no learning to impart." The intrusion of the self in literature, she feels, is dangerous and must be checked: the "self which, while it is essential to literature, is also its most dangerous antagonist. Never to be yourself and yet always— that is the problem."77

Virginia Woolf pleads that the novelist must shed his personality and maintain, like the painter and the musician, a distance between his life and work:

The novelist - it is his distinction and his danger - is terribly exposed to life. Other artists, partially at least, withdraw; they shut themselves up for weeks alone with a dish of apples and a paint-box, or a roll of music paper and a piano. When they emerge it is to forget and distract themselves. But the novelist never forgets and is seldom distracted.78

She criticises George Moore for projecting too much of himself into his characters, and thus spoiling their virtues:

The great novelist feels, sees, believes with such intensity of conviction that he hurls his belief outside himself and it flies off and lives an independent life of its own, becomes Natasha, Pierre, Levin, and is no longer Tolstoy. When, however, Mr. Moore creates a Natasha she may be charming, foolish, lovely, but her beauty, her folly, her charm are not hers, but Mr. Moore's. All her qualities refer to him.79

Virginia Woolf does not dwell on the contemporary and the personal scene with any passionate attachment to its causes and courses. From Jacob's Room to Between the Acts, we experience a gradual hardening of this belief. Owing to
Roger Fry's influence upon her, she attempts to isolate art from human experience.

Virginia Woolf is able to achieve greater impersonality also because there is more and more emphasis on form in her novels - form in a non-representational sense as in music and painting in which, as we have noted, she was keenly interested. None of her contemporaries matches her in her effort and achievement in this respect. Her attempts to give her novels the form of Post-Impressionist paintings of, say, Cezanne and the music of, say, Beethoven, demand elimination of trivialities from her work. So she hardly goes near her men and women and seldom takes any pleasure in their actions in the way Fielding, Dickens, or the Edwardians do. She exhibits no urge and utilises no opportunity to say or show what cannot be said or shown by the form. The author's personality which makes disgusting trespasses on the reader's taste in the Victorian novel has no chance with her.

The tendency towards abstraction in art and literature in the beginning of this century is also a factor contributory to Virginia Woolf's aesthetic of impersonality in the novel. That is why a feeling of disharmony with the world haunts her characters from beginning to end and they are never masters of their fate except perhaps in some moments of hallucination. And Virginia Woolf drops not a hint, not a gesture, to teach them even how to live, not to say of throwing the glove in their favour against
buffets of chance and fortune. They stand totally alienated from their creator, from us, and even from themselves. This is impersonality scaling new heights.

The Dance of the Senses:

Virginia Woolf conceded that "the look of things has a great power over me." But it is not only the eye that is active in her. The ear and the nose also function marvellously well. If *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, or *To the Lighthouse* evokes the visual sensations, *The Waves* evokes the auditory, and *Flush* the olfactory. A variety of physical sensations, indeed, overwhelms the reader of Virginia Woolf's novels in quick succession; and since all the meaning and the message of life are carried to him by these sensations, he must always be very receptive. Really, visual, auditory and olfactory sensitiveness is a great productive force with Virginia Woolf.

The visual images which the fresh June morning casts before Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* take her back to Bourton when she was there at eighteen; and these memories provide propulsion to 'action' in the novel. We may also examine the following paragraph from this novel, which can bring honour to any painter:

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations... There were roses; there were irises.... And then... how fresh, like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale - as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies, was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when
every flower — roses, carnations, irises, lilac — glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!(15-16)

In fact, Clarissa Dalloway's physical responses to beauty, colour, rhythm, pain, ugliness, evil and horror which lie spread over the novel can be caught by the eye. In To the Lighthouse, the dinner provides a richly vivid picture. The Waves is created totally out of the images, similies and metaphors of sight and sound. The novel opens with the children, Bernard, Susan, Neville, and Jinny saying, "I see" and Rhoda and Louis saying, "I hear"; and their sensual impressions are repeated throughout. But sometimes the sensations of sight and sound recur in unison. "'I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round me'", says Neville (9). The fusion of sight and sound recurs: "'Look', said Rhoda; 'listen. Look how the light becomes richer, second by second, and bloom and ripeness lie everywhere; and our eyes, as they range round this room with all its tables, seem to push through curtains of colour, red, orange, umber and queer ambiguous tints, which yield like veils and close behind them, and one thing melts into another'"(115).

The world of sensations is the real world for Virginia Woolf, since the material world reflects itself only through shapes, sounds and colours. Sensations alone, she believes, are capable of informing the intellect, and a texture woven out of them is most palpable and satisfying.
It will be correct even to say that there exists an affinity between her aesthetic and philosophic propensities—a view validated by *Between the Acts*:

'How those birds sing!' said Mrs. Swithin, at a venture. The window was open now; the birds certainly were singing. An obliging thrush hopped across the lawn; a coil of pinkish rubber twisted in its beak. Tempted by the sight to continue her imaginative reconstruction of the past, Mrs. Swithin paused; she was given to increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future; or sidelong down corridors and alleys; but she remembered her mother—her mother in that very room rebuking her (11).

Virginia Woolf's poetics of the novel, as delineated in the foregoing pages, is the result of her very deep and wide understanding of the literature, painting and music of many countries and ages. This understanding was further strengthened by her intimate friendship with artists and theoretists, such as, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and Saxon Sydney-Turner. It was Roger Fry, particularly, she says, "who set me on my feet again, and gave me a fresh start in life. It was he who was the most actively, the most imaginatively helpful of all my friends." Helped by this friendship, she was motivated to raise the novel to the status of painting and music. She pleaded that the novel too must have form, which means that it should have not only a sequential but also a repetitive and rhythmic relationship of parts; and that form should not be sacrificed to any external drama and spicy anecdote. The novel should be a combination of emotion and intellect and our appreciation of it, just as of a piece of painting or a composition of music, should depend on what it suggests and not on what it represents. A novelist, whether he is as
simple as Jane Austen or as complex as Henry James, must
penetrate life and reach at the finer shades of significance.
This is possible only if he is an artist and not an agent,
an appreciator and not a champion of values, and the actions
he depicts are the natural outcome of his convictions and
experiences. Within this aesthetically galvanised framework,
Virginia Woolf wrote her novels. Her experiments have also
to be understood with reference to this framework.

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