CHAPTER I

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Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.

It is in this spirit of freedom that Virginia Woolf begins her quest for a new aesthetic of fiction. She would not be confined to traditional forms and conventional ideas, that influenced both art and society in her time. As a social critic she was all for the freedom of women. In her writing one can notice a vein of indignant feminism at a male-dominated society. She loathed the conventions that put women in the background. She acutely felt the male-domination in creative art and fiction as well. Woolf disapproves of most fiction written in her immediate past because of this one-sidedness. They are novels of men, written in sentences which are basically men's. She was not satisfied with the voice of fiction which speaks only in a man's voice. An aspiring woman novelist, according to Woolf, would find this voice of fiction irrelevant to her purpose.

Since both society and art were male-dominated and consequently one-sided, Woolf envisaged as her primary task the quest for a new aesthetic which would do away with this one-sidedness. This

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1 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945) p. 76.
element of male dominance was very much present in her family in the figure of her Victorian father, Leslie Stephen. There is enough evidence in Woolf's diary, that she was not quite at ease under the dominating influence of her father, and with the patriarchal order he represented. On November 28, 1928 she wrote in her diary:

Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books, - inconceivable.2

Leslie Stephen's world was a world of facts and it was governed by the masculine principle. This world was directly in conflict with Woolf's own world of imagination. Herbert Marder, in his study of Woolf's feminism and art, gives a convincing account of Woolf's frame of mind and the task which she set upon herself. He writes:

Virginia Woolf saw the universe as the eternal conflict between opposites, corresponding, to masculine and feminine principles. Her main concern was to find ways of reconciling the warring opposites. As a practical feminist she sought equality between the sexes, a dynamic balance between two halves of mankind which would lead to social regeneration. As artist and mystic she sought inner harmony, the ideal state of androgyny, which would lead to the renewal of the individual .... One might say, for Virginia Woolf, feminism and mysticism converged in the doctrine of androgyny.3


The tragic absence of balance in society and of harmony in art seem to have impelled Woolf to undertake a quest. On the social plane, one half of mankind is dominated by the other, and so there is no healthy correspondence between the two. In the same way, in the artistic field, the masculine principle dominates the feminine principles. So Woolf concludes that art is one-sided. Her quest, therefore, is to re-establish harmony both in society and in the individual's mind. Both social and artistic degeneration of her time, according to Woolf, is due to a lack of harmony. Woolf's feminist quest for the equality of sexes parallels her artistic and mystic quest for the achievement of the androgynous mind, which alone would make the artist's work lasting, meaningful and complete. So *A Room of One's Own*, which is generally taken to be a piece of feminist propaganda, is an ideal starting point for a study of Woolf's critical doctrines. In it the feminist quest for the liberation of women merges into a mystic's quest for the state of androgyny, which in its turn parallels an artist's quest for an adequate form for his art. Perfect art springs from an androgynous mind, and artistic creation is possible only when a marriage is consummated in the mind between the warring opposites, the masculine and feminine principles. As physical creation is impossible if there is only one sex at work, so is literary creation impossible if there is only the masculine principle at work in the mind. So as far as literary creation is concerned, according to Woolf, it is fatal.
for a writer "to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly."

She says: 

... there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body .... And in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when the fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine.

Woolf's preoccupation is artistic even in her feminism. What she pleads for is not so much social adjustments in favour of women as adjustment in the mind of the artist so that creation becomes possible as well as meaningful. So Woolf is not a feminist in the usual sense in which the term has gained currency. She is a feminist-artist-critic. A great artist, according to Woolf, is one in whose mind there is a marriage of opposites. His personality should mirror a harmony, a perfect union between the man and the woman in his mind. Woolf further illustrates this idea by a visionary picture of a girl and a young man together in a taxi-cab, in *A Room of One's Own*:

Now it was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent lather boots,

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4 *A Room of One's Own*, p. 97.
5 Ibid., pp. 96-97.
and then a young man in a maroon overcoat; it was also bringing a taxi-cab; and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window ... and the girl and the young man ... got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere.

It is only when the girl and the young man are together in the taxi-cab of human personality that the mind is "swept on by the current" of creation. This picture is symbolic of the union of the opposing powers of the mind, intellect and intuition, of the two worlds, the world of fact and the world of imagination, of the two regions of the mind, the conscious and the unconscious, and of the two levels of reality, the external and the internal. There is a beatific vision of their union in the taxi-cab which, according to Woolf, is a necessary condition for artistic creation. A writer is great if he can effect this union of the man and the woman in his mind, that is, if he can make his intellect espouse intuition. Woolf considers Shakespeare a great writer on account of this. He could establish the ideal state of androgyny both in his mind and in his work.

Woolf's idea of androgyny may be considered as a feminist reaction to an age of undisputed male chauvinism with all its contradictions and dichotomies. The separation of the different faculties of the mind gave rise to a tragic fragmentation of life which resulted in the fragmentation of

6 Ibid., p. 95.
Woolf tried to resolve this fragmentation of life and art. In her time reason was separated from imagination, thought from feeling, intellect from emotion. There was a conflict between knowledge and values, the world of facts and the world of imagination. Modern psychologists taught that the conscious and the unconscious regions of the mind the 'Id' and the 'ego', are perpetually at war. Woolf's idea of the masculine and feminine principles corresponds to this separation. The sexual analogy in *A Room of One's Own* expresses a hope in the ultimate reconciliation of this tragic antithesis. This reconciliation, Woolf suggests, is the only means of achieving androgyny.

Woolf's idea of the androgynous mind resembles Eliot's concept of unified sensibility which he advocates against "dissociation of sensibility" or the divided mind. This divided mind is the cause of imperfect writings and Eliot leads us back to John Donne and the metaphysicals and finds a unified sensibility at work in their poetry. The similarity of the two concepts is easily noticeable. While Eliot ignored the physical analogy of the two sexes Woolf used it in order to arrive at the idea of androgyny. While Eliot considered the divided sensibility as the malady of the time, Woolf, the

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feminist, considered male dominance as the cause of all disharmony and imperfections. One cannot ascertain the indebtedness of the one to the other, but one can certainly notice the parallelism in the workings of these two great minds. Similar again to Woolf's idea of androgyny is W.B. Yeats' theory of 'unity of being', which is manifested in the Byzantine art. In this unity of being all the opposites are reconciled. Movement and stillness, the dancer and the dance are perfectly in harmony in this state of being. Perfect art is that which represents this unity of being, according to Yeats, while to Woolf perfect art is androgynous.

Woolf's concept of androgyny can be compared to D.H. Lawrence's idea of wholeness. Lawrence loathes the fragmented conception of man and advocates the idea of man as a whole in his novels. In his essay "Why the Novel Matters" he says:

Now I absolutely flatly deny that I am a soul, or a body, or a mind, or an intelligence, or a brain, or a nervous system, or a bunch of glands, or any of the rest of these bits of me. The WHOLE is greater than the part. And therefore, I who am man alive, am greater than my soul, or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or anything else that is merely a part of me ....

I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. But I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, sometime or other.

In "Study of Thomas Hardy" he expatiates on this idea of wholeness by presenting the antinomy in arts between 'Law' and 'Love'. It is only when both Law and Love form a perfect "Two-in-one" that any artistic form is possible. Lawrence comes very close to Woolf when he discusses the Male and Female Principles in man.

For every man comprises male and female in his being, the male always struggling for predominance. A woman likewise consists in male and female, with female predominant.

And a man who is strongly male tends to deny, to refute the female in him. A real 'man' takes no heed for his body, which is the more female part of him. He considers himself as an instrument, to be used in the service of some idea.

The true female, on the other hand, will eternally hold herself superior to any idea, will hold full life in the body to be the real happiness. The male exists in doing, the female in being.

If there is a conflict between these two aspects then the situation is tragic. One has to recognise the importance of both the principles. Perfection in art can only be achieved by balancing these two elements in the artist. If one is given predominance over the other there will eventually be one-sidedness. The "Male principle, of Abstraction, of Good, of the Community, embodied in 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'" should be in perfect reconciliation with "the female principle" which says "that man lived by enjoyment,

9 Ibid., p.226.
through his senses, enjoyment which ended in his senses. Art becomes meaningful only when this WHOLENESS, a union of these two principles can be effected.

Critics have established the direct influence of the "Bloomsbury Group" on Woolf's mind and art. The idea of androgyny can be traced back to the "Principle of Organic Unity" as advocated by G.E. Moore, who was the guiding spirit of Bloomsbury thinking. This principle of organic unity involves a subject-object relationship which operates between different aspects of self and the universe. Roger Fry and Clive Bell, both members of the same group, found its aesthetic correlate in the theory of "significant form" which alludes to the idea behind a work of art which gives it its significance. Woolf fused it into a "literary gestalt in which feeling and form, theme and content, and aspects of self, time, and reality form a reciprocal and interdependent whole", which in the form of androgyny she uses as a critical tool to judge the perfection of art.

If freedom to Woolf meant transcending the barriers of one's sex, or in other words, achieving androgyny in A Room of One's Own, in Orlando she offers the phantastic vision of the achievement of such freedom. There is in it a

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10 Ibid., pp. 226-227.
confusion of the sexes which is resolved ultimately in androgyne. After the long parade of patriarchal absurdity in Orlando’s career in Constantinople with all its masculine solemnities, confusions, disturbances, and amorous adventures, calm is achieved only after Orlando’s sleep for seven days. It is only then the truth is revealed. He is transformed into a woman.

He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and .... we have no choice left but to confess - he was a woman.12

Orlando’s sexual transformation is symbolic of the liberation of the truth of androgyne from the bondage of intellect. Complete freedom is achieved and the mind is freed from the clutches of patriarchal vanities and the excesses of male egoism. Orlando, however, is andrognous from the beginning and his change into a woman is only a manifestation. Even after the change he “combined in one the strength of a man and woman’s grace.”13 His change was only external and otherwise he remained as he was. The external change was but a manifestation of the inner truth which is always present. For according to Woolf, “different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that

13 Ibid.,
keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above.” Orlando, by becoming a woman, achieves the unity of intuition and intellect, which in turn helps him to a final perception of reality. The man and the woman in Orlando instruct each other. His/her self-realization becomes complete. Orlando, in other words, becomes an integrated personality. The most striking characteristic of an integrated personality is its androgynous nature. It is the loss of such personality that constitutes the recurrent themes of her fiction and the chief motif of her critical writings. Failure to achieve androgyny causes one-sidedness and this is the criticism Woolf flung at the Edwardian Triumvirate, Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett in her essays on fiction.14

The quest for androgyny which we have just examined merges itself into a novelist’s quest for an adequate aesthetic of fiction in Woolf’s essays, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and “Modern Fiction”. The ideal state of androgyny is indirectly used as a critical tool to judge the completeness or wholeness of the Edwardian writers. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” marks Woolf’s break from the Edwardian heritage of fiction. It is an attempt to determine the proper stuff of fiction in the face of a changed vision of reality. She agrees with Bennett’s view

14 Ibid., p. 98.
that character is the primary concern of the novelist. She says:

I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character and that is to express character - not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic and alive, has been evolved.15

But Woolf does not readily accept Bennett's view that the reality of the characters is the test of the excellence of a novel. It is on this ground that Bennett criticised the Georgian writers and said that they did not create characters that are real. Woolf counters this charge by asserting the historical and changing nature of reality:

But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me.16

'Mrs. Brown', the old lady in the corner with whom, according to Woolf, all novels begin "can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer."17 So the picture of Mrs. Brown, her appeal to the people, change with times. It varies from one age to another. There is no absolute standard for judging the reality of character, but there are various points of emphasis. So one may not be right when one judges the work of an age with the

16 Ibid., p. 325
17 Ibid.
critical standards of another age. So it is not right to judge the work of the Georgians according to Edwardian standards, and Woolf criticizes the Edwardian stock-in-trade of fiction for its inadequacy as a model for the Georgians. The Georgians, according to Woolf, worked under different conditions, because when the Georgians began to write, that is, "in or about December, 1910, human character changed."\(^\text{18}\) This is a very bold assertion and what Woolf has in mind is the major change that took place in the social, political, economic, intellectual and moral spheres of life at about the same period. It was a period of transition from the old intellectual order to the new socio-political and intellectual milieu. Reality, or truth, came to be looked upon in a quite different way from the earlier times. The focus shifted from the external reality to the complex inner world of the individual's consciousness. The externals became insignificant compared with the innumerable impressions created in a moment on the human mind. Psychologists like Freud, Jung and Adler, extensively surveyed the dark areas of human mind in order to establish the nature of reality behind the appearance of the external world. Their works had greatly influenced the Bloomsbury circle of which Woolf was an active member. This revolution in the way men looked at reality influenced the artists of that time. The post-impressionist

\[^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 320.\]
exhibition in London in 1910 boldly demonstrated the new way artists saw reality. It showed the inadequacy and incompleteness of the way people looked at reality in the past: Human figures were reduced to essences or outlines and were given multiple personality. It tries to depict the wholeness of vision, a view of the totality of appearance. In the wake of this change man was considered to be more than a submerged irrational self. He was a complex of consciousness, existing on many levels, a complex of personalities consisting of separate states of awareness. He was not the same from one moment to the next; there was a discontinuity in his personality. This revolutionary conception of man became the major point in the new view of reality. So Woolf boldly asserts that human character changed in 1910. Her main concern, therefore, is for an emotional perspective by which the reality of this new era could be viewed. It is the consciousness of this change which makes her very vehement in her criticism of the Edwardians. They failed to supply the Georgians with a satisfactory medium to express this new vision of reality. They failed to recognize the change of reality, of human character, that took place in their time. They lost sight of the inner aspect of reality and concerned themselves entirely with the externals which according to Woolf, are insignificant. Therefore, they are one-sided and their works, incomplete.

Georgian writers, on the other hand, recognised this change and went for a wholeness of vision. This desire was to
take fiction into new areas, "the darker places of psychology." They wanted to express the new vision of reality which took them to new areas of consciousness. But the Edwardians were the only models they could work from. So according to Woolf, if the Georgians failed to inform their character with truth or reality the fault lay with the Edwardians. The tools used by the Edwardians were not adequate to express the new vision of reality which the Georgians wanted to express. Lack of models or guidance was the reason for their lack of greatness and Woolf is all sympathy for them. The Edwardian form and method failed them in their endeavour to capture the elusive Mrs. Brown, human nature, life itself. The Georgians' view of Mrs. Brown was different because they had a new vision of reality. But the Edwardians looked at her in their own way. Mrs. Brown in the railway carriage is a poor and miserable creature bullied by Mr. Smith, the dominating male vanity. Woolf presents her as a picture of poverty and suffering:

There was something pinched about her - a look of suffering of apprehensions, and, in, addition, she was extremely small. Her feet, in their clean little boots, scarcely reached the floor. I felt she had nobody to support her; that she had to make up her mind for herself.9

The picture of Mr. Smith settling a sinister business with this lady explains the plight of human nature, of life, of reality, at the hands of the Edwardian writers. The man bullying the woman

9 Ibid., p. 322.
and the woman crying out of extreme suffering is the image of what, according to Woolf, the Edwardian writers were doing with human nature, the reality. Woolf finds these writers incomplete because they suppress the 'woman' in their mind and impose the male element in their works. In other words, they failed to achieve androgyny both in their mind and in their works. Therefore they were onesided, incomplete and not worthy models for aspiring Georgians. Commenting on the books written by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, Woolf laments:

Yet what odd books they are! Sometimes I wonder if we are right to call them books at all! For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something.

For Woolf, the Edwardians lacked the wholeness of vision which is the mark of a masterpiece. They were extremely onesided in their treatment of Mrs. Brown and lamentably limited in their vision of reality. But Woolf, while criticising them for this limitedness, conveniently forgets her own view that reality or human character changed only in 1910, by which date the Edwardians had written most of their novels. If reality changed in 1910, are the Edwardians to be blamed for their failure to represent the new reality?

But the Edwardians were never interested in character in itself; or in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside.

20 Ibid., p. 326.
Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them ... for himself. 21

Woolf again forgets that this new idea of 'character in itself' which she advocates in the face of the change, was never available to the Edwardians. So they failed to concentrate on what Woolf calls 'character in itself', a product of the change of 1910. Therefore the works of Edwardians could never be a source of inspiration or a model for the Georgians. The Georgians could not learn their business from them and Woolf says:

Now it seems to me to go to these men and ask them to teach you how to write a novel - how to create characters that are real - is precisely like going to a bootmaker and asking him to teach you how to make a watch. 22

If the spirit of the Edwardian age demanded 'boots', the Edwardian writers had their relevance and managed to be good 'bootmakers.' So Woolf is not fair in criticising them for not satisfying the demands of the new era for a 'watch'. Mark Golman clarifies Woolf's position and says that Woolf views the Edwardian novel in historical perspective, in the face of a change in the need of the hour. He says:

For Woolf the Edwardian novel, that utilitarian boot, had its historical place and purpose but it could not be a model for the artist who saw the novel as a self-contained, complex, and organic form, a delicate but indestructible watch. 23

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21 Ibid., p. 327.
22 Ibid., p. 326.
23 Mark Goldman, p. 43.
In the modern age, the Edwardian form has lost its relevance. To Woolf, the Edwardian novel, the utilitarian boot, had a purpose outside itself. It did not exist in and for itself like *Tristram Shandy* or *Pride and Prejudice*. The Edwardians' obsession with surface details and their lack of depth made them inferior to Sterne and Jane Austen. Woolf adds:

The difference perhaps is that both Sterne and Jane Austen were interested in things in themselves; in character in itself. Therefore, everything was inside the book, nothing outside.24

One wonders why Woolf does not recommend these writers as models for the Georgians since they were masters in making this self-contained, indestructible watch which the Georgians wanted their novels to be. One can only assume that human character changed, and so Sterne and Austen would not have been of much use in the face of the new task of representing the new reality. The Edwardians evidently failed in this task because they were materialists, interested in the description of the prop, the externals, the tangible. Their vision of reality amounted to the vision of the solid, the tangible, the externals. They had faith in the solid, external world of things. It was the reality for them and their novels represented this reality. But for Woolf reality lies in the inner region of the mind, in

24 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', p. 327.
the human sensibility. Environment and society become comparatively insignificant in the modern treatment of reality. This 'sensibility' has a reality of its own. The task of the modern novelist is to convey this new reality and not the external or material reality. The Edwardians conveyed only the external reality or the material reality and completely ignored the spiritual. This new view of reality is the product of the shift of emphasis from man as social reality to man as spiritual reality in the modern tradition. Woolf charges the Edwardians with materialism and depicts their materialism as she makes them travel in the railway carriage with Mrs. Brown, one by one. When he is with Mrs. Brown

... Mr. Wells would instantly project upon the window-pane a vision of a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous, and gallant world, where these musty railway-carriages and fusty old women do not exist; where there are public nurseries, fountains, and libraries, dining rooms, drawing rooms, and marriages; where every citizen is generous and candid, manly and magnificent, and rather like Mr. Wells himself. But nobody is in the least like Mrs. Brown.25

In this systematic structuring of a magnificent utopia Mrs. Brown is completely forgotten. In his splendid world of 'oughts' reality has no place. Woolf adds:

There are no Mrs. Brown in Utopia. Indeed I do not think that Mr. Wells, in his passion to make her what she ought to be, would waste a thought upon her as she is.26

25 Ibid., p. 327.
26 Ibid.,
Galsworthy would occupy himself in imagining whether there are women working in Doulton's factory, whether they make twenty five dozen earthenwares everyday, whether there are employers in Surrey who smoke rich cigars. He would busy himself with information regarding the condition of the environment and its impact on lives. But in the process Mrs. Brown is forgotten.

Burning with indignation, stuffed with information, arraigning civilization, Mr. Galsworthy would only see in Mrs. Brown a pot broken on the wheel and thrown into the corner.

Mr. Bennett, according to Woolf, would spend his time in describing houses, and Mrs. Brown would not be found within the walls of Mr. Bennett's Freehold Villas and Five Towns. Commenting on Bennett's novel, *Hilda Lessways*, Woolf says:

But we cannot hear her mother's voice or Hilda's voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines. What can Mr. Bennett be about? I have formed my own opinion of what Mr. Bennett is about - he is trying to make us imagine for him, he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there. With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr. Bennett never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner.

According to Woolf, these Edwardians in their passionate obsession with the externals had no time to understand and appreciate Mrs. Brown and

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27 Ibid., pp. 327-328.
28 Ibid., p. 330.
There she sits in the corner of the carriage - that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only in the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out - there she sits and not one of the Edwardians has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at utopias, even at the upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. And so they have developed a technique of novel-writing which suits their purpose; and they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But these tools are not our tools, and that business not ours. For those conventions are ruin and those tools are death.

This, according to Woolf, is the reason why the Edwardian writers failed to represent the thing in itself. They were more interested in bricks and walls than in reality, human nature, Mrs. Brown. Such obsession with the external is what makes them onesided and incomplete. Their minds are not androgynous and they fail to effect wholeness in their works. There is a lack of harmony in the powers of their mind. Their works do not represent a marriage between opposites, between the external reality and the inner reality, between intellect and intuition, between the world of facts and the world of imagination, and between social reality and spiritual reality. In another of her essays entitled "Modern Fiction", Woolf accuses this Edwardian Triumvirate of exciting many hopes and systematically disappointing them, and she finds reason to thank them only for

29 Ibid.
... having shown us what they might have done but have not done; what we certainly could not do, but as certainly perhaps, do not wish to do. 30

Her criticism reaches its climax in the next few lines:

No single phrase will sum up the charge or grievance which we have to bring against a mass of work so large in its volume and embodying so many qualities, both admirable and the reverse. If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers are materialists.31

These three Edwardians are contrasted with James Joyce who, according to Woolf, is a 'spiritualist.' He tries to come closer to life and reality and expresses what interests him with sincerity and exactness. No conventions or traditional forms seem to hinder him from doing what he wants. His predicament is likened by Woolf to that of a man who must break the windows in order to breathe. Once he has broken the windows he is at home. The obscenities in Joyce's works are overreaction to the conventions that manacled the genre. But nevertheless he is preferred to the Edwardians. She says:

In contrast with whom we have called materialists, Mr. Joyce is spiritual: he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these sign-posts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see.32

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p. 107.
The solid walls of Edwardian fabric fail to contain the reality, the thing in itself, within them, so much so that life escapes from Edwardian novels. Woolf goes on:

That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are wrong ones for us to use. They 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.33

So the Edwardian form which catches "life just an inch or two on the wrong side" is no more useful to a Georgian writer, for if he uses this tool "Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile."34 Woolf's disapproval of the existing form of the novel is complete when she asserts: "... at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek."35

Our next problem is to ascertain what is the thing the modern writer seeks, or rather what is the thing Virginia Woolf seeks when she writes fiction. For the materialistic Edwardians 'house' was a common ground from which they proceeded to intimacy with their readers. But this convention, according to Woolf, is inadequate to express the modern notion of reality. So the problem for the Georgians was to find a tool to convey this new reality most adequately.

33 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 332.
34 "Modern Fiction", p. 105.
35 Ibid.
The Georgian novelist, therefore, was in an awkward predicament. There was Mrs. Brown protesting that she was different, from what people made out, and luring the novelist to her rescue by the most fascinating if fleeting glimpse of her charms; there were the Edwardians handing out tools appropriate to house-building and house-breaking.

So the new reality, Mrs. Brown in the changed emotional perspective, refuses to be clothed in Edwardian garments and Woolf says:

> Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or ap, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide.

According to Woolf, this new reality is the proper stuff of fiction. So by dismissing the Edwardian form and method as irrelevant she opens up new areas of experimentation and new possibilities for fiction. Concentration on the moment and its values becomes her main preoccupation in fiction. This introduced new themes which resulted in daring changes of technique and structure in the novel. The main characteristic of the novel is not any more its loyalty to recorded events or facts, but a sense of the fluid, the shifting, the fragmented in life. The modern novel is to take the mould of the modern mind itself. If this is "the essential thing" for the novel, if Mrs. Brown is not be treated in the way the Edwardians

36 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 333.
37 "Modern Fiction", p. 105.
treated her, if the proper aim of fiction is to capture Mrs. Brown, and if Mrs. Brown is "the spirit we live by, life itself," how can a modern novelist go on writing fiction? Woolf answers: "Look within ... But it is a pity that a writer is often not able to do it. For Woolf herself gives the situation of the writer of the traditional sort:

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.

If this is how a novel is created, Woolf asks: "Is this life? Must novels be like this?" Life certainly is not like this, nor are novels. It is the myriad impressions of a mind that is significant in life. The novel should be about these innumerable impressions that "shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday." And if a novel is written in this way, if the novelist were to express his feelings freely, not bound by convention, then, Woolf says, "there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love-interest, or catastrophe in the

38 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 337.
39 "Modern Fiction", p. 106.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
accepted style. So if a writer were to 'look within' she would surely find that:

Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.

Thus by revolutionising the conception of life itself, Woolf goes on to determine the task of the new novel which she contemplates:

Is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

And so Woolf tries to discover a new aesthetic of fiction, a new form for the novel, which could adequately discharge the new task of conveying the uncircumscribed spirit, the quality of the modern mind itself. This mind is a queer conglomeration of incongruous things, full of hybrid, monstrous, unmanageable chaos of emotions. The new novel has to convey this emotional world which is tumultuous and contradictory. So the problem for Woolf was to find a suitable form to order this emotional world and to express it in its totality. In "Narrow Bridge of Art" she admits that poetry is not able to keep pace with and to

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Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
express the emotional tumult of the modern mind. The emotions imputed to the modern mind submit more readily to prose than to poetry. So this new novel which Woolf envisages has to undertake some of the tasks hitherto performed by poetry.

The new novel as it is envisaged by Woolf will be of infinite complexity because it is made up of many kinds of emotions. So the form of the novel also will be a complex one. Woolf herself gives evidence of this complexity when she describes her conception of the new novel:

It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many 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.

According to Woolf this new novel would be closer to poetry in its form and method, because its content, the emotional world, is very much that of poetry. She says:

It will give as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail ... It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquies in solitude ...

In these respects then the novel or the variety of the novel which will be written in time to come will take on some of the attributes of poetry. It will give the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams. But it will also give the sneer, the

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46 "Narrow Bridge of Art", Collected Essays II, p. 224.
contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life. It will take the mould of the queer conglomeration of incongruous things - the modern mind. Therefore it will clasp to its breast the special prerogatives of the democratic art to prose; its freedom, its fearlessness, its flexibility.\(^47\)

This new novel would not be much bothered about fact-recording. It will have very little to tell about houses, incomes, occupations of its characters. It will be different from the sociological novel. It will observe deeply but from a different angle. It will express a total view of man, his mind and his emotion. So the proper stuff of the novel is the real life, that is, every feeling, every thought, every quality of brain and spirit. The novelist's problem is one of rendering his private vision of the emotional world to the public, of contemplating "landscapes and emotions within" and making them visible to the world at large.\(^48\) His task will be to enter a new subjective world, to follow a method which is "deeper and suggestive for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid; not only what they are, but what life is."\(^49\)

Woolf's view of the new novel is not the result of her adherence to any formal positions or literary conventions. It is rather the result of her own creative experiments in her fiction. So her fiction criticism is artistic-experimental

\(^{47}\) Ibid., pp. 224-226.

\(^{48}\) "A Letter to a Young Poet", Collective Essays II, p. 189.

rather than formal or dogmatic. It was her persistent aim to convey the "varying, ... unknown and uncircumscribed spirit ... with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." For her proper stuff of fiction is not houses and towns but the complex world of the mind, the modern sensibility. The Edwardian stuff of fiction, that is, the house, is replaced by the Woolfian one, the sensibility. Novels must be true to life, and life does not merely consist in the houses in which people live. They should record the inner life of the people. They should picture not the external, parading parties, picnics, engagements and marriages, but what is going on behind this fabric which systematically mask the inner life of people. The novel for Woolf, is "a little voyage of discovery", \(^{50}\) a survey of new areas of consciousness. It is a voyage 'in.'

For the most characteristic qualities of the novel - that it registers the slow growth and development of feeling, that it follows many lives and traces their unions and fortunes over a long stretch of time - are the very qualities that are most incompatible with design and order. It is the gift of style, arrangement construction, to put us at a distance from the special life and to obliterate its features; while it is the gift of the novel to bring us into close touch with life. The two powers fight if they are brought into combination. The most complete novelist must be the novelist who can balance the two powers so that the one enhances the other.\(^{51}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 180.

In her novels Woolf tried relentlessly to discover the hidden modes of her conscious and unconscious being. According to her writing is "that process of self-examination, that perpetual effort to understand one's own feeling and express it ... in language." (Night and Day, p. 38). The thematic areas which her novels probe consist largely of the personal and inner life of her characters. In each of the novels one can notice an ardent struggle of the author "to understand her multi-levelled relationship with reality."\(^{52}\) In this task, that is, of registering the uncircumscribed, disorderly inner life of sensibility, Woolf finds the traditional forms of the novel inadequate. The old vehicles are not suited for her fictional voyage inwards, into the fresh and untraversed areas of the mind. Her attempts at writing novels demonstrate a struggle to find a form, an adequate medium in which she can contain the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" which "shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday", by which she can capture the 'luminous halo' that life is, by which she can satisfactorily enact the great drama of consciousness which goes on in the mind of her characters. Her fiction presents a gradual development towards a new novel which has its culmination in The Waves.\(^{53}\) The incessant struggle to face the challenge of Mrs. Brown, who says: "Catch me if you can," reflects in her fiction her

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\(^{52}\) Harvena Richter, p. 18.
\(^{53}\) "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 319.
struggle to arrive at an adequate aesthetic of the novel which she formulated in her essays. Her intention as a novelist is quite clearly expressed by the novelist, Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out* when he tells Rachel:

> 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.

Woolf's whole range of fiction is just one great attempt, sometimes successful, sometimes frustrated, at making figures with the fireworks of sensibility. This we shall be examining in the next chapter.

In her critical essays one finds an ardent enthusiasm to discover a new form for fiction, a new vehicle to undertake a fresh voyage into new thematic areas. Utterly disgusted with the Edwardian form and the models of fiction, she sympathetically considers the pathetic predicament of the Georgian writers, who with their awareness of the new reality were struggling to express it in a satisfactory medium. They failed to achieve greatness because they had no models to imitate.

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Such, I think, was the predicament in which the young Georgians found themselves, about the year 1910. Many of them - I am thinking of Mr. Forster and Mr. Lawrence in particular - spoilt their early work because, instead of throwing away their tools, they tried to use them. They tried to compromise. They tried to combine their own direct sense of the oddity and significance of some character with Mr. Galsworthy's knowledge of the Factory acts, Mr. Bennett's knowledge of the Five Towns. They tried it, but they had too keen, too overpowering sense of Mrs. Brown and her predicament to go on trying it much longer.55

It is intriguing why Woolf chose only these three Edwardians as models for the modern writer. She is very enthusiastic in her appreciation of Thomas Hardy in whose work, Far from the Madding Crowd, she finds a fusion of subject and method, form and content, which is a main point in her criticism.56 Hardy's poetry and tragic vision, which are the main qualities of his novels, relate him to the modern sensibility. With the earnestness of a true admirer Woolf writes:

In short, nobody can deny Hardy's power - the true novelist's power - to make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their passions and idiosyncrasies, while they have - and this is the poet's gift - something symbolical about them which is common to us all.57

Her applause of Hardy reaches its climax when she calls him "the greatest tragic writer among the English novelists."58

55 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 333.
57 Ibid., p. 251.
58 Ibid., p. 254.
If such be Hardy’s greatness and his relevance as far as modern sensibility is concerned, one wonders why Woolf disregards him as a model for the moderns on the very flimsy ground that he had published no novels after 1895. In the same way she casts aside Conrad, whom she admires for his genius in combining the outer and inner truths, in achieving the unified sensibility. Her reason for his ineligibility as a model for the moderns is that he is a Pole. All that one can assume from this is that Woolf was over-enthusiastic in criticising the Edwardians and exposing their irrelevance in the wake of a changed vision of reality. Her obsession with this new vision of reality made her unduly hasty in her indictment of the Edwardian legacy of the novel.

In Woolf’s new concept of the novel “surface realism and the demands of dialogue are bypassed for that search within which is the touchstone of twentieth century art.” So the new novel must represent the continuum of mental events in an adequate way. What is most important in this new technique is the rendering of the moments of feeling, or what Woolf calls the ‘moments of being’ in language.

Forster admires Woolf for this daring venture of unfolding the human mind in the printed pages of a book. He writes:

59 Mark Goldman, p. 55.
It is easy for a novelist to describe what a character thinks of; look at Mrs. Humphrey Ward. But to convey the actual process of thinking is a creative feat, and I know of no one except Virginia Woolf who has accomplished it.

The new form which is evolved by Woolf's experiments is the product of a personal and complex vision of life which sensitively responds to the demands of the inner reality.

This new design, in the opinion of Mark Goldman, is "an eclectic one, a traditional and experimental fusion of prose, poetry and drama in a new three-dimensional form." The search within, an inward voyage becomes the main concern of the new novel which can be called the novel of sensibility, or 'poetic novel.' As critic Woolf paves the way for this new novel and prepares her audience for it by posing herself as a common reader and exercising her exquisite sensitivity in the business of disinterested criticism. Her criticism consists in an ardent quest for the new reality, the 'thingness of things,' which should be the proper stuff of fiction. One can notice the strong vein of idealism in this quest. But Woolf is no dreamy idealist. Her fiction reveals a genuine struggle to find an adequate form to express the proper stuff of fiction, to make the genre meet the demands of her own vision of reality. In

61 Mark Goldman, p. 55.
doing this she fearlessly trespasses into the realm of poetry and drama to find a method, to render the inner life of people in its totality.

Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers.  

This throws light upon the unorthodoxy of her position as critic. Criticism to her is not a matter of theoretical absolutes, but a matter of relativism, of adjustment with the changing nature of reality. While her criticism is artistic-experimental, her methods are subjective. Her novels too are experiments in the new rhetoric of fiction. They reflect the attempts of their author to come to grips with the new reality. Hence they are subjective in tone and poetic in spirit. William Tröy finds in Woolf "the dominant metaphysical bias of a whole generation" which "brought with it its own version of an aesthetic", and "supplied a medium which involved no values other than the primary one of self-expression." Whereas Leon Edel looks at Woolf's novels as attempts to "obtain given effects of experience by a constant search for the condition of poetry." If one tries to link Woolf's experiments in fiction with the spirit of her contemporaries one can see that she was not a loner in the field of fictional innovationism.

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66 "Novel as Poem", p. 63.
Woolf's exploits are not the result of an individual attitude. In them one can notice the attempts of Bloomsbury idealism to find an 'objective correlative.' Woolf shares Lawrence's enthusiasm to make art the expression of wholeness, and Forster's concern to connect the prose with the passion in man. Woolf also "participated fully in the significant shift of emphasis, inaugurated by Henry James, from the outer social world - as explored by Balzac or the naturalists - to the sensibility with which that outer world is appreciated and felt." Her memorable feat as a critic consist in her attempts to make fiction adequate to the vision of the novelist. With the fervour of a romantic idealist she disregards the curb and curtailment of tradition and conventions in the interest of what she considers as the main thing in fiction. How far she succeeds in fulfilling the promise of a new type of novel can be ascertained from a study of her major novels.

67 Ibid., p. 68.