CHAPTER II.

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Virginia Woolf's novels represent an artist's quest for a 'significant form', in order to represent the new view of reality, to perform new fictional tasks. Woolf's career as a novelist is a protracted struggle to arrive at an adequate medium for her vision of reality. One can notice this struggle of the artist right from the *The Voyage Out* (1915) to *Between the Acts* (1941). My task in this chapter is to observe this struggle and determine the nature of its results as far as a new aesthetic of the novel is concerned. Since character revelation is the main task of the novel, and, according to Woolf, human character changed in or about 1910, my first task will be to observe and study how Woolf presents character in her novels. By saying that human character changed, Woolf means that the point of view from which character is studied underwent a change, thus antiquating the traditional narrative style. The traditional tools did not express character satisfactorily. Woolf's chief medium is sensibility. Sensibility is an instrument to reveal and unravel human character. It becomes a spectrum from which human character can be observed, and closely studied. So the novels becomes a human drama played within the inner folds of sensibility which gives form and substance to character and
thus it also supplies form and design for the novel. Few of Woolf's characters are presented by means of direct description in the traditional way. The reader is not presented with a direct revelation of character; what he gets is the impressions which a particular character creates on the sensibility of others. So characters in Woolf's novels are revealed either by means of the influence they have on other characters' minds, or through their own self-reflections or inner monologues.

The *Voyage Out*, in which Woolf was not fully successful in her abandonment of the old form, employs this method of sensibility as via media for the gradual revelation of character. We first see Rachel through the mind of Helen Ambrose:

Helen looked at her. Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes; denied beauty, now that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of colour and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than incompetent for her years. Mrs. Ambrose, who had been speaking much at random, now reflected that she certainly did not look forward to the intimacy of three or four weeks on board ship which was threatened. Women of her own age usually boring her, she supposed that girls would be worse. She glanced at Rachel again. Yes how clear it was that she would be vacillating, emotional, and when you said something to her it would make no more lasting impression than the stroke of a ship upon water. There was nothing to take hold of in girls -
something hard, permanent, satisfactory.¹

Here we have a casual impression created by Rachel upon the mind of Helen. So the picture impressionistic and elusive. We have a definite feeling that there is much more to be discovered about Rachel, which stands in tension with the initial mental picture of Helen. So the process of unravelling character in Woolf's novels is gradual and fleeting, most like the nature of our impressions. The same is the process used in the other early novels like Night and Day and Jacob's Room. The character of Katherine Hilbery in Night and Day is first introduced as it impresses itself upon the mind of another character, Denham. This picture is incomplete and inadequate and so is the picture of Katherine which Mary Datchet tries to draw in her mind:

... Mary felt herself baffled, and put back again into the position in which she had been at the beginning of their talk. It seemed to her that Katherine possessed a curious power of drawing near and receding, which sent alternate emotions through her far more quickly than was usual, and kept her in a condition of curious alertness. Desiring to clarify her, Mary bethought her of the convenient term 'egoist.'

'She's an egoist,' she said to herself, and stored that word to give to Ralph one day when, as it would certainly fall out, they were discussing Miss Hilbery.²

This technique of unravelling character by means of partial and

Incomplete mental pictures reflects Woolf's refusal or inability to circumscribe human beings to a fixed character. This is due to her own view of human personality as a continual flux of fleeting impressions which are tumultuous and contradictory. This 'uncircumscribed spirit' or 'life' does not readily submit to any verbal fixity because it is one thing now, and another later. It is continuously changing and the attempt to arrest it and to confine it within the capsules of language is a desperate task which Woolf undertakes in her novels. In *Jacob's Room* Jacob's character is not immediately presented as a fixed entity. He is revealed gradually through the effect he produces on the other people in the novel. He does not reveal himself by what he says or does but by what others think of him. For instance the impression he creates upon Mrs. Norman who travels in a train to Cambridge with him helps in presenting his character to the reader.

Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite to a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole - they see all sorts of things - they see themselves ...* Mrs. Norman now read three pages of one of Mr. Morris's novels. Should she say to the young man (and after all he was the same as her own boy): 'If you want to smoke, don't mind me'? No: he seemed absolutely indifferent to her presence ... she did not wish to interrupt.

But since, even at her age, she noted his indifference presumably he was in some way or other - to her at least - nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy? One must do the best one can with her report. Anyhow,
this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen. It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done ...^3

The picture we get of Jacob is only sustained by the impressions of other people in the novel. We can only see him through the eyes of others, as he presents himself to the different moods and temperaments of different characters:

'I like Jacob Flanders?' wrote Clara Durrant in her diary. 'He is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him, though he's frightening because ....' 'No, no, no,' she sighed, standing at the green-house door, 'don't break - don't spoil' - what? something infinitely wonderful.^4

The futility of circumscribing or denominating character, of which Woolf was very sensitively aware, is reflected in Clara's anxiety in not breaking or spoiling "something infinitely wonderful," the character of Jacob Flanders. This romantic impression of Clara is offset by the series of reflections about Jacob that are going on in other peoples' minds:

Betty Flanders was romantic about Archer and tender about John; she was unreasonably irritated by Jacob's clumsiness in the house.^5

and again in the mind of Captain Barfoot, Jacob is presented:

Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why .... It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound,

[^5]Ibid., p. 68.
impartial, and absolute just opinion of our fellow creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case, we are but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And, why, if this and much more is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us - why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.

Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love.

In this passage, in which one can notice the rather too predominant authorial presence, a conviction about the inadequacy and the inconsequentiality of our knowledge about one another is expressed. This is the reason why a single portrait of a particular character cannot be isolated from Woolf's novels by means of description or dramatization. Her characters lack the solidity which lends itself to description or narration. Forster's criticism of Woolf's novels, though unjustified, springs from this fact. He says:

Now there seem to be two sorts of life in fiction, life on the page, and life eternal. Life on the page she could give; her characters never seem unreal, however, slight or fantastic their lineaments, and they can be trusted to behave appropriately. Life eternal she could seldom give; she could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered, for instance ....

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6 Ibid.

Forster is speaking about character which corresponds to the traditional point of view which Woolf disregards in her novels because, according to her, human character changed and she is looking at it from a point of view different from that of Jane Austen or Dickens. She does not create character in consonance with traditional expectations of character in the novel. Joan Bennet points this out when she says:

Virginia Woolf came to believe that all definition of character involved such a refusal to come near and that character in the sense in which the word is used of persons in fiction or, as often as not in biography, does not exist in real life. It is possible that the impression that she does not create clear or memorable characters is due to the fact her portraits are of a different kind from those to which the reader of fiction is accustomed.

Just as the post-impressionist painters looked at and represented reality in a new way, Woolf tried to look at character in a new and different way from her predecessors. She was unwilling to circumscribe human nature, 'Mrs. Brown,' within the strict and clearly definable limit of character. Her novels and her characters exemplify this. In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay's reflection on the nature of self slips into this characteristic withdrawal.

... one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael must feel, our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is

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unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by.9

It is this sharp awareness of what is beneath the surface, of something 'dark', 'all spreading', and 'unfathomably deep', that makes Woolf dissatisfied with the 'apparitions', the 'things you know us by.' In The Waves Bernard shares Woolf's complex vision of human nature and says:

I am not one and simple, but complex and many.10

Woolf's method of characterization is cumulative because her understanding of human nature too is cumulative. Her characters, though they operate only on the plane of sensibility, enlist our imaginative sympathy. They are seen only through glimpses and the writer eliminates from her books the illusion of the all-seeing eye. She makes us see the complex, elusive human nature with our own imperfect vision. "It is sympathy rather than judgement that she invokes, her personages are apprehended rather than comprehended."11 This reflects Woolf's enthusiastic surrender to the Bergsonian idea of the world of flux and individual intuition, which together with G. E. Moore's Principles of perception helped her to perceive reality in a way which became intrinsic to her subjective methods. The medium therefore, involved the primary

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11 Joan Bennett, op cit., p. 27.
value of self-expression, the living spirit of the subjective novel. Her method is so adopted to express that 'diaphanous envelope' with which she surrounds her characters and with which she orders her fictional world. William Troy shows the imperativeness of the method of subjectivity to Woolf:

The subjective mode is the only mode especially designed for temperaments immersed in their own sensibility, obsessed with its movements and vacillations, fascinated by its instability... it was alone capable of projecting the sensibility which because it has remained so uniform throughout her work we may be permitted to call Mrs. Woolf's own.12

The life of individual sensibility in a world of flux is Woolf's primary concern as a novelist. She watches the movements, vacillations and instability of this sensibility and tries to present a convincing record of this with as little mixture of the alien as possible. For this purpose she adopts the subjective or confessional method to probe into the new areas of her characters' sensibility, as she probed into her own. The novel, for Woolf, becomes a form of self-discovery, a probe into the different modes of her own being. This she does by exploiting the infinite possibilities of the genre. Her problems as a novelist are succinctly recorded by Joan Bennett:

She was impelled by her own "vision of life" to emphasize the fluidity of human personality rather than its fixity. She perceived the variety of

impressions made by one person upon the people round him and his own ever-changing consciousness of the surrounding world. Consequently, instead of defining an identity or epitomizing it in a particular incident, she invites us to discover it by living in the minds of her characters, or in the minds of others with whom they come into contact. The discovery can only be made by a gradually acquired intimacy. 13

A passage from The Waves which presents Bernard's self-reflection expresses just this view:

A space was cleared in my mind. I saw through the thick leaves of habit. Leaning over the gate, I regretted so much litter, so much unaccomplishment and separation, for one cannot cross London to see a friend, life being so full of engagements; nor take ships to India to see a naked man spearing fish in blue water. I said life had been imperfect, an unfinished phrase. It has been impossible for me, taking snuff as I do from any bagman met in a train, to keep coherency, that sense of generations, of women carrying red pitchers to the Nile, of the nightingale who sings among conquests and migrations ... 14

Bernard's reflection on the nature of life and its imperfection throws light on the busy world of engagements, and his own incapability to be consistent, to keep "that sense of generations", explains why character cannot be a clearly definable absolute to Virginia Woolf. It always remains an "unfinished phrase." Woolf stresses the elements of discontinuity in the human personality which for her consist in the undercurrents of shifting impressions. Thus by taking the mould of the modern mind itself, Woolf's novels try to represent the fleeting nature of modern sensibility. So sensibility becomes both the form and the theme of Woolf's novels.

13 Joan Bennett, op cit., pp. 31-32.
14 The Waves, p. 201.
Psychological relationship among the characters is contributory to the pattern of the novel which is emotional rather than visual. This plays the greatest role in building up the thematic structure of Woolf's novels, and is directly the influence of Woolf's complex vision of human nature and reality. She tries to portray character by exploring the emotional relationship of her characters to one another. So the novel becomes a portrait of living relationships painted on the canvas of the individual's sensibility, an inner drama of emotional life expressed in prose charged with poetic overtones. Human nature cannot be clearly defined as this or that in Woolf's novels because Woolf's understanding of human nature is ceaselessly complex. In the words of Bernard in *The Waves*:

> 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.  

What Bernard seems to be giving expression to is his basic androgeneity, his vision of himself as a whole constituted by his relationships to other people in the novel. Later in the novel, it is Bernard again who sums up the whole rhythmic movement of the novel which is made up of the rhythmic movements of six peoples' lives. So Bernard epitomizes Woolf's idea of androgyny which she uses in this novel as a device to show that

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15 *The Waves*, p. 196.
character is no single thing. Different characters are bound up with one another and express one another, thus forming a perfectly coherent androgynous whole. Relationship again is the chief focus of character in Mrs. Dalloway. Relationship between Peter Walsh and Clarissa contributes to the structural solidity of the book. Peter comes in as an interrupter or a destroyer of Clarissa's domesticity, even her marriage. His dominance over her as a lover was intolerable to her. The scene between them in Clarissa's house is evocative of the kind of relationship that exists between them.

"Well, and what's happened to you?" she said. So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. He assembled from different quarters all sorts of things; praise; his career at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done his job.16

Clarissa's reassertion of her life and domesticity can be seen in her parting words when he leaves: "Remember my party tonight" which becomes a rhythm in his consciousness as he takes a morning walk. Their reflections on each other contribute in providing the reader an insight into their character.

The relationship between Clarissa and Septimus mirrors the division of the self. Septimus, though Clarissa

never even saw him, is her 'double', a secret sharer of her suppressed life and he represents what she might have been. At the party the news of his death brings to her an awareness of her own struggle with life, her own compromise. The characters in the book live but in the relationship they have with one another. The book is not about Clarissa or Peter Walsh or Septimus. It is about human life itself, its misery and happiness and its final consummation in death. Virginia Woolf's art is not primarily applied to the drawing of individual memorable figures in her novels. What she is mainly concerned with is to present life as it is. This she does by following the workings of the individual minds. So we do not have characters systematically developed in sequence, or epitomized in definite action. Instead we have different consciousness and their movements constituting the rhythmic movement of the human spirit, which unfolds itself in the novel, not by means of continuous narrative but by the juxtaposition of different movements of the individual minds.

In To the Lighthouse, other people are revealed only in their relationship to Mrs. Ramsay and contribute to the revelation of her personality. A continual shifting from mind to mind throws light on the nature of relationship among the characters. For instance Lily's reflection on Charles Tansley at the dinner table clearly reveals the nature of the relationship that exists between them. The passage is significant
because it reveals the mutual understanding of the two in the face of a wrecked relationship.

He was really, Lily Briscoe thought, inspite of his eyes, but then look at his nose, look at his hands, the most uncharming human being she had ever met. Then why did she mind what he said? Women can't write, women can't paint - what did it matter, coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it? Why did her whole being bow, like corn under a wind, and erect itself again from this abasement only with a great and rather painful effort? She must make it once more. There's the spring on the table cloth; there's my painting; I must move the tree to the middle; that matters - nothing else. Could she not hold fast to that, she asked herself, and not lose her temper, and not argue; and if she wanted a little revenge take it by laughing at him.

'Oh, Mr. Tansley,' she said, 'do take me to the Lighthouse with you. I should so love.'

She was telling lies he could see. She was saying what she did not mean to annoy him, for some reason. She was laughing at him. He was in his old flannel trousers. He had no others. He felt very rough, isolated and lonely. He knew that she was trying to tease him for some reason; she didn't want to go to the Lighthouse with him; she despised him; so did Prue Ramsay; so did they all. But he was not going to be made a fool of by women, so he turned deliberately in his chair and looked out of the window and said, all in a jerk, very rudely, it would be too rough for her tomorrow. She would be sick.17

Since human personality is revealed by recording inner monologues of characters, stories and sequences have disappeared from Woolf's novels. What we have instead are some emotional tremulations showing the ebb and flow of lives, the condition of peoples' mind. Woolf's disappointment with

17 To the Lighthouse, p. 100.
The traditional structure of sequence and story is well expressed by Bernard in *The Waves*:

But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passes through another. And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories.  

Woolf's vision of life cannot be effectively communicated by means of "Toys I twist, bubbles I blow." Reality is too elusive to be contained within the bounds of a sequence. The ebb and flow human sensibility is not the sort of thing that one can express in a logical sequence. It exists in the mind, but not perhaps, as the universe of Newton existed. Hence it cannot be studied, defined, measured and reduced to general "laws." It can only be traced by following closely the tide of feelings in people's mind. And so the novel's pattern is emotional rather than sequential because the nature of the reality expressed in the novel is emotional and not logical. The reader's curiosity about what happened next also disappears and he is made to watch the rhythmic ebb and flow of love. In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay reflects:

But what have I done with my life? thought Mrs. Ramsay taking her place at the head of the table and looking at all the plates making white circles on it .... At the far end, was her husband, sitting down, all in a heap, frowning. What at? she did not know. She did not mind. She could not understand how she ever felt any emotion or any affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup, as if there was an

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18 *The Waves*, p. 103.
eddy - there - and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. It's all come to an end, she thought, while they came in, one after another, Charles Tansley - 'Sit there, please', she said - Augustus Carmichael - and sat down. And meanwhile she waited, passively, for someone to answer her, for something to happen. But this is not a thing she thought, ladling out soup, that one says.¹⁹

From this reflection on the futility of her life she switches over to a different mood, that of pity for William Bankes:

- poor man! who had no wife and children, and dined alone in lodgings except for to-night, and in pity for him, life being now strong enough to bear her on again, she began all this business, as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and found rest on the floor of the sea.²⁰

The same enactment of the moment of feeling is shown again in Lily Briscoe's mind:

Lily Briscoe watched her drifting into that strange no-man's land where to follow people is impossible and yet their going inflicts such a chill on those who watch them that they always try at least to follow them with their eyes as one follows a fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon.

How old she looks, how worn she looks, Lily thought, and how remote. Then when she turned to William Bankes, smiling, it was as if the ship had turned with some amusement because she was relieved, why does she pity him? For that was the impression she gave, when she told him that his letters were in the hall. Poor William Bankes, she seemed to be saying, as if her own weariness had been partly

¹⁹ To the Lighthouse, pp. 96-97.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 97.
pitying people, and the life in her, her resolve
to live again, had been stirred by pity.21

Projection of the 'moments of being' as we have
just seen in the passages above, is again the technique
followed in The Waves. The Waves traces the patterns of
feeling of six different people through different phases of
their lives. These rhythmic patterns correspond to the
rhythmic ebb and flow of the waves in the sea. The characters
express their moments of feeling through inner monologues
which are poetic and lyrical. The outside world is presented
through the choric intervention of the dramatic interludes,
which provide a background against which the characters reveal
their 'moments of being.' The whole novel can be said to be a
juxtaposition of these 'moments of being' as they are presented
by different characters in their soliloquies in solitude. At
the end of her school time, Susan looks forward to being at
home:

I shall throw myself on a bank by the river and
watch the fish slip in and out among the reeds.
The palm of my hands will be painted with pine
needles. I shall there unfold and take out
whatever it is that I have made here; something
hard. For something has grown in me here,
through the winters and summers, or staircases,
in bedrooms. I do not want, as Jinny wants, to
be admired. I do not want people, when I come
in, to look up with admiration. I want to give,
to be given, and solitude in which to unfold my
possessions.22

21 Ibid., OP. 99-153
22 The Waves, p. 39.
This longing to give, to be given, seems to be fulfilled when one hears her in her middle age;

Now I measure, I preserve. At night I sit in the arm-chair and stretch my arm for my sewing; and hear my husband snore; and look up when the light from a passing car dazzles the windows and feel the waves of my life tossed, broken, round me who am rooted; and hear cries, and see other's lives eddying like straws round the piers of a bridge while I push my needle in and draw my thread through the calico.

I think sometimes of Percival who loved me; He rode and fell in India. I think sometimes of Rhoda. Uneasy cries wake me at dead of night. But for the most part I walk content with my sons. I cut the dead petals from hollyhocks. Rather squat, grey before my time, but with clear eyes, pear-shaped eyes, I pace my fields.23

These two passages give a rather comprehensive picture of the process of Susan's emotional maturation without burdening the reader with the incidents which accompany it. The same is the case with Rhoda whose emotional maturation can be traced from two such passages. Here is Rhoda at school:

'That is my face', said Rhoda, 'in the looking glass behind Susan's shoulders - that face is my face.' But I will duck behind her to hid it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No; whereas I shift and change and seen through in a second. If they meet a housemaid she looks at them without laughing. But she laughs at me. They know what to say if spoken to. They laugh really; they get angry really; while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it.24

23 Ibid., p. 137.
24 Ibid., p. 30-31.
One can see the hesitation to face life and the lack of self-confidence in these lines which have been transformed into a dread of life in Rhoda, the woman:

Oh life, how I have dreaded you ... oh, human beings how how I have hated you. How you have nudged, how you have interrupted, how hideous you have looked in Oxford street how... Squalid sitting opposite each other staring in the Tube! ... How you snatched from me the white faces that lie between hour and hour and rolled them into dirty pellets and tossed them into the wastepaper basket with your greasy paws. Yet those were my life.

But I yielded. Sneers and yawns were covered with hand. I did not go out into the street and break a bottle in the gutter as a sign of rage. Trembling with ardour, I pretended that I was not surprised. If Susan and Jinny pulled up their stockings like that, I pulled mine up like that also. So terrible was life that I held up shade after shade. Look at life through this, look at life through that; let there be rose leaves, let there be vine leaves - I covered the whole street, Oxford street, Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with vine leaves and rose leaves.25

In the same way all the characters are mirrored through their own reflections and we see their slow and gradual development from childhood to maturity and to old age. The novel is an enactment of the poetic and emotional drama of their relationships and their attitudes towards life, and their final consummation in death: "The waves broke on the shore."26 The relationship among them is shown through their imaginative reactions, in what they feel about one another, and not in what they do for one another. They seem to be incapable of any

25 Ibid., p. 145.
significant action and the novel is devoid of any incidents. The characters live in a poetical world of imagination and their main pre-occupation is trying to express the rhythmic movements of their consciousness through an imperfect language. In this they reflect their creator's struggle to find verbal expression for the different modes of her being.

In Between the Acts too, the poetry of emotional relationship takes its source from the minds of the characters and expresses itself in their reflections. The moments between the acts are Woolf's enactment of the drama of emotional tension and resolution of the characters, of the ebb and flow of love. The intervals in the love of Isa and Giles, and their emotional tension are presented through their sensibility.

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.26(a)

This theme of personal relationship is a part of the larger human comedy which is enacted in the whole book. The characters struggle to define their relationships and the rhythm of their feeling is what makes 'between the acts' significant. For instance Isa is trying to define her feelings for Haines, in her reflections:

Inside the glass, in her eyes, she saw what she had felt overnight for the ravaged, the silent, the romantic gentleman farmer. 'In love', was in her eyes. But outside, on the washstand, on the dressing-table, among the silver boxes and tooth-brushes, was the other love; love for her husband, the stockbroker - 'The father of my children', she added slipping into the cliche conveniently provided by fiction. Inner was in the eyes; outer love on the dressing-table. But what feeling was it that stirred in her now when above the looking glass, out of doors, she saw coming across the lawn the perambulator; two nurses, and her little boy George, lagging behind.

Woolf's technique of using sensibility as form in her novels brings about a fusion of character and form; in Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway the subject is one single sensibility. In To the Lighthouse Mrs. Ramsay is the central dominating force which holds the other characters together. The lives of other characters in the novel are interminably intermixed with the life of Mrs. Ramsay. They are all influenced by her even after her death. Her memory is the common factor in the minds of the other characters. Thus by laying the focus on one single sensibility and presenting other characters only in relation to this sensibility, Woolf achieves a perfect union of theme and content. Her novels represent the lack of continuity which is a central characteristic of the movement of sensibility. Sensibility is the mirror through which the reader is given a vision of character. The method of Woolf's

novels is the same as the method of following one's own impressions, the workings of one's sensibility. Character again is nothing but a sensibility seen through other sensibilities.

One can also observe the use of cumulative images and the symbolist method in her novels. In *To the Lighthouse* the lighthouse is used as a symbol unifying the motivations of all the characters. It is the common point towards which their desires are oriented. It directs the movement of their thought and sensibility. It marks a point of fulfillment. This symbol gives a convincing unity to the whole book. The novel is about a central action, of 'going to the Lighthouse', and so the last part involves narrative and sequential movement. Woolf slips into the narrative mode towards the end of the novel, when Mr. Ramsay and his children are nearing the Lighthouse.

Now they could see two men on the Lighthouse, watching them and making ready to meet them.

Mr. Ramsay buttoned his coat, and turned up his trousers. He took the large, badly packed, brown paper parcel which Nancy had got ready and sat with it on his knee. Thus in complete readiness to land he sat looking back at the island.

Percival in *The Waves* unites the other six characters, and is a source of inspiration for them. After his death in India, he

28 *To the Lighthouse*, p. 240.
still remains the living force uniting the minds of the other characters. The other characters think of him in their soliloquies. He provides the common ground for their thought after death. When he is alive, he represents the model which the others want to imitate. In this he is like the lighthouse symbol in To the Lighthouse. Both Percival and the lighthouse operate as forces motivating and propelling the will of the characters. Devices of rhythm and symbolical contrasts are used in The Waves to reveal character. Characters are revealed through the rhythm of the images in their mind. Each character has an image as a motif; a chained beast stamping on the shore for Louis, the willow tree by the river for Bernard, "that wild hunting-song, Percival's music" for Neville. These are contrasted with the cumulative image of their lives taken as a whole, the movements of the sea. The Waves is the most poetic of all Woolf's novels both in conception and form, and in method and style. The characters seem to be lyrical poets making lyrical utterances. The form of the novel therefore, is that of an extended lyric. The Waves exemplifies the extent to which the novel can go in search of a form by attaining to the condition of poetry.

Joan Bennett speaks of Woolf's use of form as a vehicle for two kinds of experience, one on the plane of prose and the other on the plane of poetry.²⁹ In Mrs. Dalloway

²⁹ Joan Bennett, pp. 101-102.
there is a poetic pattern probing the eternal questions of human existence. On this plane there are only love, death and the evanescent beauty of the world. Whereas in the prose pattern we are given a picture of the modern world in all its dark aspects of class-struggle, economic insecurity, neurotic temperament and war. *To the Lighthouse* also operates on these two planes. On the prose plane the novel is about the Ramsays and it reveals the character of different people connected with them. In this plane the novel is about Woolf's own family.

Mr. Ramsay is more or less a portrait of Leslie Stephen, and Mrs. Ramsay, that of Woolf's mother. In her diary Woolf writes of the novel:

> This is going to be fairly short; to have father's character done complete in it; and mother's and St. Ives; and child-hood; and all the usual things I try to put in - life, death, etc. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting we perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel. (May 14, 1925, *AWD*, p. 75).

On the poetic plane the Lighthouse is a symbol, and its alternating light and shadow suggest the rhythms of joy and sorrow in life and the alternating radiance and darkness of human relationships. In *The Waves* the descriptive interludes are dramatic prose-poems delineating the participation of the objective world in the rhythmic movements of the subjective world of the characters are about to enter the different walks

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30 Ruth Z. Temple, "Never Say 'I'", p. 93.
of life, the complex changes of their personalities are symbolized by the flight and song of the birds.

In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that tree, on that bush, now sang together in chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky. They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this moment. Also they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they chased each other, escaping, pursuing, pecking each other as they turned high in the air. And then tiring of pursuit and flight, lovely they came descending, delicately declining, dropped down and sat silent on the tree, on the wall, with their bright eyes glancing, and their heads turned this way; aware, awake; intensely conscious of one thing, one object in particular.

The poetic passage is suggestive of the life of company, solitude, fear and competition which the characters are about to begin. Joan Bennett finds these interludes to be unsatisfactory because they "interrupt the mood of the narrative, they force the reader to abandon one point of view and adopt another; consequently they disturb his 'willing suspension of disbelief.'" However, one gets the impression that they succeed in helping the author to express the 'luminous halo' that life is. Interruption are inevitable in a novel which does not proceed through a progressive

31 The Waves, p. 53.
32 Joan Bennett, p. 107.
representation of motives because "life is not a series of
gig-lamps symmetrically arranged." So *The Waves* marks the
triumph of a new form; It also marks the culmination of the
poetic method.

It is in *Between the Acts*, however, that Woolf
succeeds in achieving a fusion of form and statement. The
principle of unity in the novel is to be found in the
simultaneity of form and statement, because the novelist has
succeeded in "making form part of the statement and statement
part of the form." *Between the Acts* is a triumph of the
new form, and Woolf calls it "an interesting attempt in a new
method" and a method "more quintessential than the others;"*

*AWD* (London), p. 135. This new method can be called 'novel-
drama' and it enlarged the possibilities of the novel. It is
informed by a sense of the really dramatic uses of prose and
poetry, and of poetic uses of drama. This new method "is able
to express in itself, by itself, the conflict of fragmentation
and continuity, flux and stability, chaos and order." *The
book consists of three dramas: drama of the pageant itself,
the 'Acts'; drama of the relationships of the people, the
'between the acts'; and drama of the interrelationship of the
two dramas themselves. It also expresses the problem of

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34 Ibid., p. 148.
35 Ibid.
order and chaos, art and society, stasis and flux. The pageant symbolizes art which brings people together, though they are isolated. Art thus becomes a means of social integration. "So the drama becomes a part of life; and life enters into the drama." Art and society become complementary; the orderly and the chaotic, the permanent and the mutable.

Miss La Trobe, the artist, tries to order the society by presenting a pageant. She is like Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* who orders her life through painting. In the same way Woolf is ordering society and life by seeing them as parts of drama. She sees as a continuous dramatic conflict and uses the dramatic form to express it in the novel. "Drama, then, is form, statement and symbol in the novel." It is part of the way of life. It orders both life and art, pictures the conflict of life. It consists of the conflicts between isolation and connection, permanence and mutability, stasis and flow, appearance and reality. These are the different levels which show the fundamental conflict between the Masculine Principle and the Feminine Principle which Woolf observed both in life and in art. But drama reveals the identity of these opposites. The dramatic principle is dialectical and suggests that all things imply their opposites and contain them. The last act of the Pageant shows the interaction between art and

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36 Ibid., p. 148.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 153.
39 Ibid.
life. Art, therefore, implies and contains Life. It consists in Life objectified and Life is Art lived. The dramatic form in *Between the Acts* achieves the objectification of life, of sensibility, of emotion and feeling. In this process of unification which the new form attempts, androgenity is achieved through a dialectical method. Art is successful in resolving the traditional conflicts between opposites. But the sense of despair is very much present in Miss La Trobe, the artist of the pageant:

She hadn't made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her. And turning, she strode to the actors ...

Miss La Trobe wanted to show the audience themselves, and her attempts mirror Woolf's own endeavour as a novelist to create the sense of life as it is actually lived. Miss La Trobe's frustration reflects Woolf's own frustration in her attempts.

Miss La Trobe stood there with her eye on the script. After Vic. she had written, 'try ten mins.: of present time: swallows, cows, etc.' She wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them with present time reality. But something was going wrong with the experiment. 'Reality too strong!', she muttered.

This note of frustration is reflected in *The Waves* through Bernard who perceives the irrelevance and futility of words and phrases in giving a coherent shape to reality.

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40 Ibid., p. 72.
41 Ibid., p. 154.
42 Ibid., p. 125.
'So the sincerity of the moment passed,' Bernard cried, 'so it had become symbolical; and that I could not stand.' Let us commit any blasphemy of laughter and criticism rather than exude this lily-sweet glue; and cover him over with phrases.\textsuperscript{43}

This may be taken as Woolf's sincere confession of the inadequacy of language in expressing human nature and her own view of reality. Her struggle to find a new form in her novels is sometimes successful and sometimes frustrated. Her problems as a novelist can be described as those of a poet trying to write novels. She had a poetic conception of human personality which she wanted to convey in her fiction. E.M. Forster finds the reason for Woolf's failure in her unwillingness to let go of poetry, which is why she is unable to grasp things which are gained by letting go of poetry.\textsuperscript{44} Hence the haunting, mystical quality of vision and the narrow range of characters. Forster emphasizes this obsession with poetry which characterizes Woolf's fiction.

Belonging to the world of poetry, but fascinated by another world, she is always stretching out from her enchanted trees and snatching bits from the flux of daily life as they float past, and out of these bits she builds novels. She would not plunge.\textsuperscript{44}

This expresses Woolf's problem as a novelist. She was a poet and she wanted to write something as near to a novel as possible.

\textsuperscript{43} The Waves, p. 188.
This expresses Woolf's problem as a novelist. She was a poet and she wanted to write something as near to a novel as possible. By not letting go of poetry she sacrifices something else vital to her art. Her preoccupation with the new form and her clinging to poetry interfered with the reality of her characters. To a reader accustomed to the traditional fiction, Woolf's characters seem shadows. But her achievement in the new type of fiction is nevertheless remarkable, and she is very relevant in the modern age because "she reminds us of the importance of sensation in an age which practises brutality and recommends ideals." Untroubled by any motives which usually guide a writer, - money, reputation, or philanthropy, - she proceeded with her experiments in fiction with a singleness of purpose, which was the most rare thing in the writers of her generation or indeed of any generation.