

INFORMATION TO USERS

This was produced from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure you of complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark it is an indication that the film inspector noticed either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, or duplicate copy. Unless we meant to delete copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed, you will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed the photographer has followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. For any illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and tipped into your xerographic copy. Requests can be made to our Dissertations Customer Services Department.
5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases we have filmed the best available copy.

**University
Microfilms
International**

300 N. ZEEB ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48106
18 BEDFORD ROW, LONDON WC1R 4EJ, ENGLAND

7916461

POIRIER, SUZANNE
CHARACTERIZATION AND THEORY OF PERSONALITY IN
THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA - LINCOLN, PH.D.,
1978

University
Microfilms
International

300 N ZEEB ROAD, ANN ARBOR, MI 48106

© 1979

SUZANNE POIRIER

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CHARACTERIZATION AND THEORY OF PERSONALITY IN
THE NOVELS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

by

Suzanne Poirier

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

Under the Supervision of Professor June P. Levine

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1978

TITLE

Characterization and Theory of Personality in

the Novels of Virginia Woolf

BY

Suzanne Poirier

APPROVED

DATE

June Perry Levine, Director

Nov. 21, 1978

Dorothy Zimmerman

Nov. 21, 1978

Moirra Ferguson

Nov. 21, 1978

Louis Crompton

Nov. 21, 1978

Linda Pratt

Nov. 21, 1978

Charles Mignon

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
1	AN APPROACH TO CHARACTERIZATION IN WOOLF'S NOVELS. . . .	1
2	THE FUNCTION OF CHARACTER.	9
3	WOOLF'S THEORY OF PERSONALITY.	38
4	THE EXPERIENCE OF CRITICISM: A REVIEW AND AN ORIENTATION.	71
5	<u>THE VOYAGE OUT</u>	108
6	<u>JACOB'S ROOM</u>	148
7	<u>MRS. DALLOWAY, TO THE LIGHTHOUSE, THE WAVES.</u>	183
8	<u>THE YEARS.</u>	224
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY		267

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1

AN APPROACH TO CHARACTERIZATION IN WOOLF'S NOVELS

At the age of 19, nearly five years before publishing her first literary criticism and over ten years before the completion of her first novel, Virginia Woolf was concerned about characterization in fiction. In a letter to her brother, she wondered why the characters of Marlowe's plays didn't seem to her "more human" and complained that "really they might have been cut out with a pair of scissors--as far as mere humanity goes."¹ In 1905, four years later, she praised Lady Robert Cecil's character-making ability, saying, "And I am sure you have the feeling of live people in you, and the way they act and react; I recognise it, because I am wholly without it."² Woolf expressed doubts about her own skill in characterization frequently during the early years of her writing. Referring to a memoir of her family, she despaired that she "blunder[ed] in a rash way after motive and human character"; while writing The Voyage Out, she commented that "to bring out a stir of live men and women, against a background . . . is immensely difficult to do."³ This challenge, how to create "live men and women," followed Woolf throughout her career. While she wrote her next to last novel, The Years, she noted in her diary that she was worried "about the value of those figures. I'm afraid of the didactic."⁴ At the novel's completion, nearly three and a half years later, she remarked that she had been "trying to cut the characters deep in a phrase."⁵

In her middle books, however, Woolf's interest seems to have focused less sharply on character. Regarding The Waves, Woolf commented somewhat facetiously, "Odd, that they (The Times) [sic] should praise my characters when I meant to have none."⁶ At times she expressed irritation with critics who attacked the lack of verisimilitude in her characters instead of noting other, more important aspects of the novels. While writing Jacob's Room, Woolf anticipated the criticism her novel would evoke among those readers "who want human character,"⁷ implying that the method in this novel should be considered above what she felt to be her inadequacies in understanding and presenting character. She repeated this idea in several letters, making such comments as follow:

But how far can one convey character without realism? That is my problem--one of them at least. You're right that I can't do the realism, though I admire those who can.⁸

It is true, I expect, that the characters remain shadowy for the most part; but the method was not so much at fault as my ignorance of how to use it psychologically.⁹

Woolf's distrust of her ability to understand and, consequently, to represent character faithfully, also persisted. "I utterly distrust my own insight into character. It is infantile," she wrote her sister in 1928.¹⁰

Quotations such as these reveal that Woolf admired lifelike characterization but often felt incapable of creating it herself. They also show her tendency to include psychology and methodology in the same thought. Such a juxtaposition raises questions in the reader's mind about what Woolf is trying to achieve in her characterizations, what

specifically causes her occasional frustration, and how she can consider a book, such as The Waves with its six speaking or thinking persons, to be "without" characters. What, according to Woolf, constitutes a "real" fictional character? What function is character to serve? And how? And why does Woolf perceive the particular functions of character and methods for characterization that she does?

Such questions must be approached from several angles. For one thing, one can identify what Woolf "likes," both critically and non-critically (the two may not always coincide) in other writers, thus offering some criteria for her standards for fiction and its characters. Ideology is also involved, as her own characters play out the themes of her stories. Woolf's methodology should be considered as her attempt not only to create "real" characters but also to incorporate in them her ideas about life and literature. These considerations, equally applicable to all writers, stress that characterization, so often considered by critics and teachers as primarily a technique of writing, is part of a broader conception of fiction of which methodology is only a part. Characterization should be approached more completely, much as one approaches a writer's "philosophy," asking why as well as how a character is created, a question that often demands that readers consider how an author measures people in real life.

Woolf's understanding of "real life" itself is, perhaps, in a large way responsible for her ability to include both critical standards and ideology in her discussions of characterization. Her view is expansive, and, rather than force a resolution of what to her may seem

incongruous, she often allows the coexistence of both qualities. For example, she writes in her diary:

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on forever; will last forever; goes down to the bottom of the world--this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud in the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change, one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive and continuous we human beings, and show the light through.¹¹

Woolf seeks no answer to this conflict, in the end allowing both solidity and transitoriness to contribute to her perception of life. Contradiction does not necessarily imply conflict; the recognition of dualities does not assume that one of the pair must take precedence over the other. Such a choice would narrow one's field of vision, and Woolf feels this restriction is wrong. The following lines begin with her need for the mental stimulation of London, but her comments end on a much broader thought:

Lord Lord how many things I want--how many flowers I visit--& often I plunge into London, between tea & dinner, & walk & walk, reviving my fires, in the city, in some wretched slum, where I peep in at the doors of public houses. Where people mistake, as I think, is in perpetually narrowing & naming these immensely composite & wide flung passions--driving stakes through them, herding them between screens.¹²

"Narrowing and naming" are two ways to confine and kill the passions.

In viewing life, too, Woolf is equally unwilling to set limits, to form pat definitions. Instead, she is able to accept simultaneously opposite aspects of a situation, such as the permanence and impermanence of life. In approaching Woolf's writing, in turn, readers must guard

against "narrowing and naming" her ideas too closely. Not only does such an approach defy her wishes, but, because she accepted--enthusiastically, it often seems--such diversity in her world, any attempt to categorize her ideas too thoroughly runs the danger of distorting her generous embrace of an often incongruous but, nevertheless, harmonious life.

Concurrent with Woolf's enthusiastic recognition of a diverse, ever-changing universe is her admiration of people who have a great capacity for experience and feeling, for change and growth. For her, a "good" person is not defined by a set of morals but rather by such personal qualities as openness, flexibility, development, and effort. The characteristics of life itself are reflected in those who move through it. Thus, as life can be both permanent or fleeting, men and women can be both great and insignificant. Translated into fiction, Woolf's tastes are broad and tolerant, as the vastness and multifacetedness of life can scarcely be embodied in one mood or style or writing. In methodology, she emphasizes the dynamics of personality, its complexity as well as its ability to infuse and be infused by all surrounding it. A character seen in its fullness must be seen in those who touch it, in those it touches, and in the process and effect of such exchanges. When Woolf writes, each character becomes both an individual power and a receptacle for all impressions.

Such statements require clarification and will be the subjects of subsequent chapters. Past criticism of Woolf's novels, which will also be considered in another chapter, has dealt most extensively with her ideas. Methodology is often considered within these studies, with

imagery, point of view, and stream of consciousness receiving the most attention. Characterization is discussed almost entirely in studies of the "middle" books, Jacob's Room through The Waves. It is usually considered within studies of broader intent, generally with the aim of assessing whether or not characters are, in that critic's estimation, successful representatives of Woolf's ideas. To date, no full-length works exist about characterization alone.

The studies which consider Woolf's methodology tend to see her innovations as a deliberate result of her ideas and usually imply that she developed her style to match her ideas. This may, in part, be true, but such a causal relationship de-emphasizes the importance that the craft of writing played in Woolf's life. Words were a tool and a challenge to her; they were often a focus for, rather than a byproduct of, her writing. For example, in reading de Quincey's autobiography she concludes that "we can draw all our pleasures from the words themselves," and in her own life she found that "the central fact remains stable, which is the fact of my own pleasure in the art."¹³ Although she objects to Percy Lubbock's Craft of Fiction because she feels it isolates technique too much from the emotions of the literature, that he speaks of form "as if it were something interposed between us and the book," she is equally annoyed with Forster's Aspects of the Novel because he seems to deny that literature can exist or have value purely as a work of art, and she is incredulous that "a wise and brilliant book, like Mr. Forster's, can be written about fiction without saying more than a sentence or two about the medium in which a novelist works," an attitude she finds

reprehensibly "unaesthetic."¹⁴ Woolf agrees with Roger Fry that, although the final effect of art transcends its original thought and form, both ingredients are equally important. Because the art of writing is of such concern to Woolf, it will not be relegated here to the means which serve her themes, but rather both "vision and expression" will be seen as working equally in her writing.¹⁵

Because I see several elements of equal importance contributing to characterization in Woolf's novels, the following chapters could be organized in various ways. I have chosen to begin by discussing character specifically because most criticism of Woolf tends to consider her characters as subordinate to her ideas and style. First, how does Woolf define "character," and how does that definition apply to fiction? Next, what qualities of both real and fictional people does Woolf most value, and how do these values affect the presentation of her own characters? When we learn what she has said about character, and indirectly about the world these characters inhabit, it will become clear that her notions about "character" and "life" remain basically unchanged throughout her lifetime. It is, however, some time before she becomes fully conscious of her ideas and finds the words with which to express them. The progress of her awareness and articulation of her views, in turn, influences attitudes towards her own characters as she writes each novel. Finally, all of these values, their development, and Woolf's facility in presenting them are reflected in her methods of characterization, methods which change in degree but not in kind over the course of her career.

Footnotes

¹The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, I. 1888-1912, ed. Nigel Nicolson, asst. ed. Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), letter to Thoby Stephen (November 5, 1901), p. 45.

²*Ibid.*, letter to Lady Robert Cecil (July 1905), p. 197.

³*Ibid.*, letters to Clive Bell (April 15, 1908; and February 7?, 1909), pp. 325, 383.

⁴A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (1953; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., Harvest Paperback, 1954), entry for January 21, 1933, p. 188.

⁵*Ibid.* (June 21, 1936), p. 260.

⁶*Ibid.* (October 5, 1931), p. 170.

⁷*Ibid.* (October 14, 1922), p. 51.

⁸The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two, 1912-1922, ed. Nigel Nicolson, asst. ed. Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), letter to David Garnett (October 20, 1922), p. 571.

⁹*Ibid.*, letter to R. C. Trevelyan (November 23, 1922), p. 588.

¹⁰A.L.S. to Vanessa Bell (January 9, 1928). This and all other cited unpublished writing is taken from the Henry W. and Alfred A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature in the New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations), hereafter referred to as "Berg."

¹¹A Writer's Diary (January 4, 1929), p. 138.

¹²A.L.S. to Ethel Mary Smyth (Berg), August 15, 1930.

¹³"DeQuincey's Autobiography," The Second Common Reader (1932; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Harvest Paperback, 1960), pp. 119-20; and A Writer's Diary (May 12, 1919), p. 14.

¹⁴"On Re-reading Novels," The Moment and Other Essays (1948; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest Paperback, 1974), p. 160; and "The Art of Fiction," The Moment, pp. 110-11.

¹⁵"On Re-reading Novels," The Moment, pp. 160-61.

CHAPTER 2

THE FUNCTION OF CHARACTER

The first consideration is character itself--how Woolf defines it, how important she thinks it is, and what role she assigns to it in literature. Woolf's words--"character," "life," and so on--are like ropes: their strength comes from separate threads tightly braided. By teasing apart the strands, or elements, of her words, we can see not only each word's fullness but also its ability to incorporate fact and fiction, concrete and abstract.

For Woolf, people are at the center of all novels. She believes that, because people are such a pervasive part of our lives, we readers watch and evaluate them much as we watch and evaluate living people. Enlightenment or aesthetics aside, Woolf describes the general appeal of literature as follows:

[O]ne element remains constant in all novels, and that is the human element; they are about people, they excite in us the feelings that people excite in us in real life. The novel is the only form of art which seeks to make us believe that it is giving a full and truthful record of the life of a real person. . . . Our most habitual and natural sympathies are roused with the first words; we feel them expand and contract, in liking or disliking, hope or fear on every page. We watch the character and behaviour of Becky Sharp or Richard Fernald and instinctively come to an opinion about them as about real people, tacitly accepting this or that impression, judging each motive, and forming the opinion that they are charming but insincere, good or dull, secretive but interesting, as we make up our minds about the characters of people we meet.¹

The quotation presents two assumptions that underlie much of Woolf's writing about fiction. First, she describes simple, recognizable human

existence and the reader's equally simple--"I like/don't like that person"--response to it. She is not addressing any particular aspect of existence in these lines, though she does do so in other essays which will be considered later in this chapter. Although Woolf proclaims "the full record of life," including "the growth and development of feelings," to be the writer's goal,² she has her readers not judging the novelist's success or failure in achieving such an end, but rather deciding what they think about the motives, charms, sincerity of the people in the novel. Her first insistence here, and throughout much of her literary criticism, is that the "human element" furnishes fiction with a familiar point of reference for its readers. This personal response to people and their predicaments is Woolf's first reaction to fiction, a response she assumes occurs in all readers.

Second, although Woolf is discussing a simple reaction to fictional heroines and heroes instead of a sophisticated analytical response, she does distinguish here between people and their characters. Motive, charm, and sincerity are aspects of people which are observable as "we watch the character and behaviour" of them. "Character" adds dimension to "people." By using the two terms, Woolf implies something more intangible in "character" than in "people," a not unusual distinction, but a necessary differentiation as one begins unraveling Woolf's perception of "character."

Before going further, a few words should be said about possible problems in analyzing Woolf's critical writing. Some readers have accused Woolf of inconsistency in her critical pronouncements.³ Indeed,

her own words do often seem to refute her statements. For instance, she seems to belittle detail when she praises Peacock's "more poetic point of view" in which "the huge burden of fact is [not] based upon a firm foundation of dinner, luncheon, bed, and breakfast."⁴ She delights in Meredith's desire "to crush the truth out in a series of metaphors or a string of epigrams with as little resort to dull fact as may be."⁵ Finally, she goes so far as to suggest that it is the task of today's novelists to look inside to their feelings rather than outside to "convention" even though, as the result, "perhaps not a single button [would be] sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it."⁶ In these passages Woolf seems to distinguish between factual truth and a truth that is more abstract or subjective; she doesn't exactly contradict herself, but she enlarges the meaning of "truth" and creates a hierarchy among her distinctions. The "inconsistency" may more accurately occur in her varying preference for one type of truth to another in different essays.

Also regarding Woolf's "self-contradiction," readers must first remember that Woolf wrote criticism from about 1906 until her death in 1941. It is both unfair and unrealistic to demand consistency from a period when Woolf was beginning her first novel to a time when she was a recognized leader in innovative fiction. Not only should a critic allow for growth in the writer, but Woolf herself demands it. "There is only one way to remain young," she writes. "It is to cease doing what you have learnt to do easily and perhaps successfully, and attempt to do what you are not certain of being able to do at all."⁷ With this dynamic vision of a writer's career, absolute consistency in a writer's critical

opinions is not only doubtful but would be considered almost reprehensible.

Woolf's embrace of fiction is wholehearted and generous. Someone who concludes, "As we look back it seems that the novelist can do anything,"⁸ is approaching fiction with an expansiveness that must include countless elements that may often seem quite incongruous or even inharmonious. Readers should always be alert to Woolf's assumptions, paying particular attention to any personal meanings for stock literary terms, such as "people" and "character." If her words are closely attended to and a survey of her critical writing taken, there can emerge a general theory of fictional people and their character that is not diminished but rather enhanced by Woolf's beliefs in the vastness and changeability of fiction.

As previously noted, Woolf's references to "character" often suggest qualities beyond a person's mere physical presence. Woolf refers to the nebulousness of these qualities in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" when she confesses that it is difficult for her to explain "what novelists mean when they talk about character, what the impulse is that urges them so powerfully every now and then to embody their view in writing," implying that "character" is a conception unique to each novelist.⁹ She presents this idea more directly in the same essay when she writes:

You see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that. And when it comes to writing each makes a further selection on principles of his own. Thus Mrs. Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer.¹⁰

Character can vary not only among contemporaries but between decades and nationalities. Furthermore, Woolf seems to have moved from fictional character to human character, subsequently transferring opinions first formed about real people to the people of novels.

But, Woolf also implies, always present and apart from character are the writers who observe, judge, and use character for their purposes. Woolf notes the omnipresence of the writer in an essay on Jane Austen, as she remarks:

Always the stress is laid upon character. How, we are made to wonder, will Emma behave when Lord Osborne and Tom Musgrove make their call at five minutes before three, just as Mary is bringing in the tray and the knife-case? . . . The turns and twists of the dialogue keep us on the tenter-hooks of suspense. . . . And when, in the end, Emma behaves in such a way as to vindicate our highest hopes of her, we are moved as if we had been made witness of a matter of the highest importance. . . . It has the permanent quality of literature. Think away the surface animation, the likeness to life, and there remains to provide a deeper pleasure, an exquisite discrimination of human values. Dismiss this too from the mind and one can dwell with extreme satisfaction upon the more abstract art . . . as one enjoys poetry, for itself, and not as a link which carries the story this way and that.¹¹

Although Woolf sees character as the superficial focus of the book, presented here through people's words and actions, she goes on to state her pleasure in discovering the writer's assessment of human values, the opinions about character in life that produce Austen's characters in fiction. Besides this, Woolf can look past action and dialogue and the values underlying them to the very process of constructing the vehicle for the values. Character is very much subject to the prejudices and manipulation of the novelist.

Another quotation, about George Gissing, also shows Woolf's awareness of the author's ideas controlling character, this time through thought:

With all his narrowness of outlook and meagreness of sensibility, Gissing is one of the extremely rare novelists who believes in the power of the mind, who makes his people think. They are thus differently poised from the majority of fictitious men and women. The awful hierarchy of the passions is slightly displaced But the brain works, and that alone is enough to give us a sense of freedom. For to think is to become complex; it is to overflow one's private life in the life of politics or art or ideas, to have relationships based partly on them, and not on sexual desire alone. . . . [Gissing's books] owe their peculiar grimness to the fact that the people who suffer most are capable of making their suffering part of a reasoned view of life. The thought endures when the feeling has gone. Their unhappiness represents something more lasting than a personal reverse; it becomes part of a view of life. Hence when we have finished one of Gissing's novels we have taken away not a character, nor an incident, but the comment of a thoughtful man upon life as life seemed to him.¹²

Of particular interest here is Woolf's comment that "the brain works, and that alone is enough to give us a sense of freedom." Give us a sense of the thinking person's freedom, or of that character's freedom? And freedom from what--the rest of the world? The novelist? Ceasing "to be a 'character,'" for Woolf, implies that the fictional figures take on a greater significance, become part of a greater scheme of existence than the purely personal. One also has the feeling that the character ceases to be fictional and becomes itself somehow alive. Woolf's immediately subsequent use of the pronoun "one" seems to be either endowing a paper and ink person with more humanness than usually attributed to a literary character or else moving from a critical discussion of thought as a means of presenting or developing character in

fiction to a more general consideration of the ability of thought to ennoble humankind itself, lifting it from a self-centered to a more all-encompassing view of life. However Woolf is using "freedom" here, this quotation conveys two more facets of "character." First, thought, in fiction or in fact, adds depth to a person through both heightened knowledge and intensified feeling, notably the ability to suffer. Second, "character," whether defined as simply a person or as the qualities a person possesses, is individual but can be transcended, in this instance by thought, to become part of "something more lasting . . . part of a view of life." "Character" is taking on meanings both specific and universal, factual and ephemeral.

Ceasing to be a character is a complex phenomenon, and Woolf explores the delicate relationship between the novelist's mind and his or her fictional character's existence in numerous essays. Of Tom Jones and Moll Flanders, for example, she writes, "But consider how many things we know about them, how much we guess, what scenes of beauty and romance we set them in, how much of England is their background--without a word of description perhaps, but merely because they are themselves."¹³ That "they are themselves" invests Tom and Moll with a uniqueness for which Woolf offers no immediate definition. "Selfness" seems to rely on both the creator and the creation. For one thing, although the novelist manipulates character, Woolf delights in fictional characters in themselves; she has an almost childlike willingness to believe in them as real people. It is a willingness, in fact, that she assumes in all readers when she asserts that "of all these appetites

[for reading novels], perhaps, the simplest is the desire to believe wholly and entirely in something which is fictitious."¹⁴ Bernard Blackstone is one of several critics who notes that Woolf demands that literature be "alive."¹⁵

This may, in part, be a cause of Woolf's concern that characters be "themselves." On the other hand, selfness also relies heavily on the creator--a rather paradoxical proposition. For example, although Woolf declares that the similarity of all Chaucer's young women is monotonous, she concludes that this composite woman:

has a stability which is only to be found where the poet has made up his mind about young women, of course, but also about the world they live in, its end, its nature, and his own craft and technique, so that his mind is free to apply its force fully to its object. It does not occur to him that his Griselda might be improved or altered. There is no blur about her, no hesitation; she proves nothing; she is content to be herself. Upon her, therefore, the mind can rest with that unconscious ease which allows it, from hints and suggestions, to endow her with many more qualities than are actually referred to. Such is the power of conviction, a rare gift. . . . Once believe in Chaucer's young men and women and we have no need of preaching and protest. We know what he finds good, what evil; the less said the better. Let him get on with his story . . . and we will supply the landscape, give his society its belief, its standing towards life and death, and make of the journey to Canterbury a spiritual pilgrimage.¹⁶

In this passage Woolf uses character as the starting point for several thoughts. First a character's selfness is a result of the writer's control over all aspects of his or her work. Chaucer's young women are the product not only of his careful observation and generalization of all the young women of his time but also of his own confidence in his observations and opinions of his entire universe. Because of his

self-assurance in his world and its inhabitants, he can present his characters straightforwardly, without editorializing--"preaching and protest"--that would perhaps suggest an insistence, defensiveness, or need to explain that exists in those not comfortably confident in their beliefs. A minimum of detail is needed because the scene is already clear to the writer. Writers with this assurance are free to let their stories and characters unfold naturally, "naturally" because everything in their writing is always and unconsciously in accord with some assumed world picture. Characters are, in effect, free to be "themselves."

This minimum of detail or explication--"we will supply the landscape" and "the less said the better"--provides the "hints and suggestions" to Chaucer's readers to fill in for themselves the characters and ideas outlined by the poet. Now it is the reader who completes, or even supplies, a character's self, another paradoxical idea. The writer, the reader, and the character work together equally to create an independent larger-than-fiction individual. With the one word, "character," Woolf means not only the actions and words the writer gives her people but the entire creative participation of writer and character and reader.

Woolf assumes the active imagination of readers and their willing participation in the creation of literature, asserting that readers "will supply the landscape, give [Chaucer's] society its belief." Furthermore, she makes another, more exacting demand of the reader. "Once believe in Chaucer's young men and women," she says, and we will know Chaucer's values. She does not ask that we share Chaucer's

beliefs, only that we recognize and accept them as elements of his world. By viewing Chaucer's characters on his terms, even if his idea of young women does not correspond with our own, we gain the whole of his world, and his writing is enriched for us. This tolerance for the writer's beliefs or point of view is what Woolf refers to in other essays when she insists on the importance of discovering an author's "perspective" in writing, for, in all fairness to writers, and in order to understand fully their lives as well as their novels, one must determine "how the novelist orders his world."¹⁷ David Daiches remarks that Woolf was interested in discovering the moods of the writers she reviewed,¹⁸ indicating not only her constant awareness of the controller behind the fiction but also her desire to understand a work on its writer's own terms. In short, Woolf does more than state that readers are eager to believe in fiction;¹⁹ she demands that they believe in fictitious people in order to derive the fullest benefit from the fiction they read.

That readers believe in the fairies of novelists may seem a naive demand, at times carrying too far a "willing suspension of disbelief." Solomon Fishman, who has also noticed that such a demand may seem somewhat extreme, interprets Woolf's position thus: "Virginia Woolf's critical approach precluded a dualistic interpretation of literature; it focused sharply on the point at which 'life and something that is not life' are fused, rather than on the differences which separate art and life."²⁰ Fishman describes Woolf's experience of literature as a sort of synthesis of art and life, an approach not

incongruous with Roger Fry's fusion of fact and vision.²¹ Fishman's explanation is similar to the one above; "art" overlaps "life"--or life, art--to create the experience of literature much as reader, writer, and "written" combine to create the experience of character. In Woolf's mind, concepts are as active as they are intellectual, and this action includes participation as much as it does more sedate observation. Character, which began as a few words and actions assigned to a name in a story, has become an amazingly dynamic cooperation among real and fictional minds and people.

Still another dimension can be added. Not only do reader and writer contribute to the selfness of a character, but so does its fictional environment. For example, Woolf admires Ring Lardner's characters because:

With extraordinary ease and aptitude, with the quickest strokes, the surest touch, the sharpest insight, he lets Jack Keele the baseball player cut out his own outline, fill in his own depths, until the figure of the foolish, boastful, innocent athlete lives before us. As he babbles out his mind on paper, there rise up friends, sweethearts, the scenery, town, and country--all surround him and make him up in his completeness.²²

First, Lardner creates Jack, but then Jack goes on to create "his own outline." Finally, the friends and setting Jack creates in turn create more of Jack's character. Those around Jack contribute to his definition. Writer, main character, other characters: all become creators without any apparent competition or confusion. None seems to have the upper hand nor to obtrude upon the realms of another's creativity.

It is a tenuous triangle, however, and Woolf frequently finds that the balance fails. And it fails most often, notably, with the