

# VIRGINIA WOOLF

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VIRGINIA WOOLF is probably the most important woman writer of to-day. A few years ago, when she was writing *The Waves*, and already had *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* to her credit, there would have been no need for that "probably." But the distinct falling off in her more recent works, in *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, seems to demand it. Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf's personal development has been so remarkable, and several of her books are so distinguished among contemporary work, that no other woman writer has yet disputed her claim to her present preeminence. Her development has been as startling as it has been rapid. Her early novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, were written in the current style of John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett and Mr. Wells. They are not experimental, but conventional. They employ the traditional framework of character and plot, action and incident, dialogue, reported introspection and narrative. Critics, wise after the event, may find the seeds of *Mrs. Dalloway* in *The Voyage Out*; but no contemporary writer could have foretold that *Night and Day* would be followed by *To The Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

Mrs. Woolf's early novels are of no great intrinsic importance. They are no worse, but also not much better, than the novels of her contemporaries. It is not on them that her reputation rests. They have not attracted the attention of the critics in the same way as her later experimental novels, and it is with these that we shall be most concerned. But before attempting a critical evaluation of these novels, there are other aspects of Virginia Woolf's work which can be profitably explored. Besides the novels, there are the works of criticism. They are not vast in bulk: the whole might be contained in one large volume. But they are of a very high order: they are important in themselves, and they are relevant to the assessment of their writer's own creative work. Mrs. Woolf has written both social criticism and literary criticism. The one gives us her personal opinions about life, about the order of things. The other gives us her views about books, her preferences and her

tastes. We shall discuss them in this order; and then we shall apply the conclusions to the judgment of her novels.

The social criticism of Mrs. Woolf is scattered about in several pamphlets and occasional essays; but it is also concentrated in two books, one written some years ago, the other a more recent publication. These are *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In both books Mrs. Woolf has the same major topic. She is concerned with women; more particularly, she is concerned with a group of women for which she declares there is no word in the language, and which by default she describes as "the daughters of educated men." Mrs. Woolf is the champion of their cause. In *A Room of One's Own* she traces the social history, the position in society, of women through the ages; she deplores the restraints, the hardships which men have imposed on them; and she maintains that neither they nor any others, for that matter, can be reasonably expected to produce great literature unless and until they have a room of their own and a steady income. Thus baldly stated, the theory does not seem acceptable. Mrs. Woolf expresses herself much more subtly, and with considerable wit, elegance and charm. The smooth sentences, the well modulated periods, flow easily from her pen. We are enchanted, but we are not convinced; and hence the bald statement, which steers clear of the artist's persuasiveness and comes closer to the data of the economist. For it is by these data—I will not term them "facts"—that theory must be finally judged. And we think of the Elizabethan dramatists, we think of Keats; pursuing the line of thought, we think of Mozart and Cézanne, and we realise that great works of art have been produced on incomes much less than the five hundred pounds which Mrs. Woolf stipulates. Doubtless works of art will continue to be produced on much smaller incomes, and the theory clearly does not hold water. But it is important that Mrs. Woolf did advance this theory: she thinks in terms, she belongs to a world, of private rooms and comfortable incomes. The effect of all this on her creative work will be seen later.

She is even more concerned with women in *Three Guineas*. But, as before, they are the daughters of educated men, they belong to one particular social class. They have rooms of their own, and they have assured incomes. Although Mrs. Woolf's thesis in this book is more acceptable than the idea behind *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* itself is a much less satis-

fyng piece or work. It is less genuinely enchanting than the earlier essay. Instead of a mannered style we have a highly conceited one; instead of evidences of good breeding we have (for Mrs. Woolf) several lapses of tone. The whole is uneven, and very disappointing. Whereas in *A Room of One's Own* the reader is content to watch the argument unfold, in *Three Guineas* he is more inclined to dispute and to argue. There is less of an inducement to turn the page and follow the rhythm of a period or the evolution of an image. *Three Guineas* has little of the subtlety of *A Room of One's Own*. It is more convincing as a social document, but less persuasive as a work of art. As pieces of social criticism, however, both books emphasize the same topics. Both deal with the position of women, both bring women sharply into focus before the reader's eyes. And both are concerned with a particular social *milieu*, a limited cross-section of life. Mrs. Woolf's world is a very feminine world, and a somewhat exclusive world too.

Turning now to the literary criticism, we are immediately struck by the interest it displays in the work of women writers. *Orlando* is dedicated to Miss Sackville-West, and attempts, among other things, to analyse her development in poetry. *The Common Reader* refers to a whole galaxy of women writers. Its pages are crossed by Margaret Paston, the Countess of Pembroke, the Duchess of Newcastle, and Lady Winchilsea, by Dorothy Osborne and Dorothy Wordsworth, by Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters, by Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti. In this respect, Mrs. Woolf's literary criticism is the exact counterpart of her social criticism. They both deal with the same major topic. But her literary tastes are not confined to the work of women writers solely. Her tastes are indeed catholic. *Orlando* is evidence of the wide range of authors which Mrs. Woolf can enjoy and appreciate. She admires Montaigne, she is well read in Chapman and Webster and the Jacobean dramatists, she gives high praise to Addison and Sterne. But there is a certain unity involved in her choice of favourite writers. There is something which links Montaigne and Webster and Addison and Sterne, and which is reflected in the best of Mrs. Woolf's own work. They are all urbane writers; their tone, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, is the tone of the city, of the centre. They all admire grace and ease and polish, with the occasional glittering *bon mot*. They all tend towards the meditative or the introspective. And similarly, in Mrs. Woolf's own novels, we are conscious of an introspective

approach, a tendency towards continual analysis. The style is balanced and controlled. It does not eschew ornament: it is indeed very highly mannered. But the ornament is not garish or flamboyant; it blends perfectly with its context, and gives it added richness instead of distracting the attention from it. Thus Mrs. Woolf reads with the eye of a poet, and her tastes supplement her own works. She also reads with the eye of a novelist, and delights especially in personal essays and in diaries and journals. She is eager to learn about the private lives of other people; she wants to know the details of their existences, however trifling in themselves, for of such details are great novels written.

Of the novel itself, Mrs. Woolf has a good deal to say. Her essay on "Modern Fiction" in *The Common Reader* is especially relevant. She is here dealing with John Galsworthy and the other conventional novelists of the first decades of the present century. "It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us," she writes, "and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul." Mrs. Woolf herself has indeed turned her back upon these novelists and marched, not into the desert, but into a new and unexplored territory, rich and strange, although at present her way is not as clear-cut as it once was, and she seems in danger of losing herself in vaporous mazes. For her, these writers are "materialists." "They spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring." This type of writer "seems constrained, not by his own free will, but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in his thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole." Mrs. Woolf's attack on the conventional novelists of the early twentieth century recalls Wordsworth's criticisms of the poetic diction of the Augustan writers. In both cases, the critic is combating an outworn tradition, a feeble way of writing, in which purely conventional form has triumphed over the last traces of spiritual content. When the content is vital, lively, worth communicating, it will arrange the form to suit itself, and will not be dominated by it. When a novelist has something to say that is worth saying, he will find that what he has to say will draw unto itself the way in which it should be said. He will be concerned with his novel as such, and not with the

conventional trappings of the novel. He will be occupied, in Coleridge's words, with "form as proceeding" as opposed to "shape as superinduced." John Galsworthy deals too often with shape as superinduced: Virginia Woolf is primarily interested in form as proceeding.

A preoccupation with form is the most striking characteristic of Mrs. Woolf's creative work. And the perfection of the form is due, in its turn, to the integrity of the content. However aloof she may seem to be from her characters and their movements, she nevertheless gives her reader the impression that she has genuinely experienced the subject-matter of which she treats. She has studied people; she has observed things. She writes continually with her eye on the object. She has realised that life is not merely a simple procession of supposedly great events, but a complex interweaving of apparently small details. "Life," she has discovered, "is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." And, in her experimental novels, Mrs. Woolf has tried to come close to life as she thus conceives it; "to record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall;" to "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness." It is this pattern, the pattern of life, which gives form to her novels; and not a superinduced shape which distorts the true pattern.

Mrs. Woolf begins hesitatingly at first in *Jacob's Room*, but this novel gains in power and momentum as it progresses. In the first few pages the reader might well imagine himself back in the world of *The Voyage Out*. But, towards the end, the atmosphere of *Jacob's Room* is the easy, confident atmosphere of *Mrs. Dalloway*. There is some traditional material left in *Jacob's Room*. There are long passages of direct narrative, of conventionally reported introspection, of dialogue in the manner of Galsworthy and Mr. Wells. But some very definite steps forward have been taken. This novel is the first instance of Mrs. Woolf's ability to place her reader in the middle of her characters' time-stream, with the minimum of space and apparent effort. It is not as deftly done as in *To The Lighthouse*, or especially *Mrs. Dalloway*; but we are moving towards this deftness. Again, for the first time, we are given a creative instance of Mrs. Woolf's belief that "the proper stuff of fiction does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction—every



feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss." And in *Jacob's Room* the reader is occasionally aware of a state of supersensitiveness in Mrs. Woolf, when everything seems to matter, when no perception comes amiss. This is true of the celebrated description of the tea-shop, where the cashier's hands "cased in black mittens," and with finger-tips "swollen as sausages" seem to take on a universal significance. Even the statement "Damp cubes of pastry fell into mouths opened like triangular bags" is of the utmost importance in its context. Mrs. Woolf has already begun to show that life is a semi-transparent envelope, and not a series of gig-lamps; that men and women are complex beings, the nature of whose personalities must be hinted and suggested rather than delineated and defined. She always emphasizes that Jacob Flanders is difficult to assess. After he has been deserted by Florinda, she describes him, with her eye characteristically on the object, thus: "The light drenched Jacob from head to toe. You could see the pattern on his trousers, the old thorns on his stick, his shoelaces, bare hands and face." She then treats of the superficial expression on his face, and significantly continues: "Whether we know what was in his mind, is another question." Mrs. Woolf recognises the complexity of her own character: it is a healthy sign.

But *Jacob's Room* is uneven, despite its very moving conclusion. Few passages reach the standard of the tea-shop episode, and the technique is on the whole fairly obvious. Thus Mrs. Woolf's habit of creating an atmosphere by juxtaposing fragments of conversation almost degenerates into a trick. And the characterisation varies considerably. There is only one really "round" character, and that is Jacob himself. The others are more or less "flat," including Florinda. We note that the one successful character belongs to a particular social stratum, and the further Mrs. Woolf moves from that *milieu*, the less sympathetic her delineation becomes. We remember the title: it is *Jacob's Room*; Jacob in fact has a room of his own, and a comfortable income. Mrs. Woolf's titles are not without significance.

There is none of the fumbling of *Jacob's Room* in what might be described as Mrs. Woolf's mature experiments, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*. The formal qualities of *Mrs. Dalloway* are exquisite. This novel has balance, dignity, restraint; it has a pattern that is not superinduced, but vital to it. The idea of Time gives it unity; and the whole is bound

together by the rhythmical refrain of "First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air." With the greatest possible artistic economy the reader is placed in the relevant time-stream; and after a few pages he feels that he has known Mrs. Dalloway all his life. Clarissa Dalloway is placed before the reader in all her complexity and perfectly "round," with an apparent lack of effort. How "round" she is, may be judged from the "flat" sketch of this character which is somewhat unkindly presented in *The Voyage Out*. We see most of the action through her eyes; we move in a largely feminine world, and judge by a feminine standard of values. There could have been no more fitting title for this novel than the direct and straightforward *Mrs. Dalloway*. This character is the first of a succession of fully drawn women characters in Mrs. Woolf's writings. Again, like *Jacob's Room*, this novel illustrates Mrs. Woolf's power to give universal significance to apparently trivial events and characters. In one memorable passage, the voice of an old woman singing in the street near a Tube Station is compared to "the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth." Nevertheless, *Mrs. Dalloway* is limited insofar as the values it deals with are limited values. If we contrast the treatment of Mrs. Dalloway with the treatment of Septimus and Rezia Smith, we realise that Mrs. Woolf has been guilty of her usual fault. Mrs. Dalloway has a room of her own—indeed she has several—and she is excellently portrayed. The Smiths have no room of their own, and their delineation somehow lacks conviction if not sympathy. Mrs. Woolf is sincerely interested in these characters, and describes their comings and goings in faithful detail: in this respect the problem must not be over-simplified. But they do not come to life as Mrs. Dalloway comes to life; their world is not real in the way that Mrs. Dalloway's world is real; they move as automata, rather than as vital characters. Apart from this seemingly inescapable defect, however, the novel is very effective, and sweeps inevitably to its conclusion, like the royal car which glided so smoothly across Piccadilly and so into Buckingham Palace.

The values discussed in *To The Lighthouse* are wider than those in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and in this respect *To The Lighthouse* shows a broadening of scope. *To The Lighthouse* is a development of *Mrs. Dalloway* in matter rather than in manner. The manner of *To The Lighthouse* is the manner, already indicated, of *Mrs. Dalloway*; but its matter is much more complex. *To*

*The Lighthouse* is concerned with the degree of unification of the visions of the characters concerned, and especially of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Mrs. Ramsay has attained a unified and comprehensive social vision; Lily Briscoe strives after a complete artistic vision, and the book closes upon her triumph. "Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision." Once more we have a concentration on the women characters: the general scene is viewed through women's eyes, and usually through Mrs. Ramsay's. Indeed the novel might well have been called *Mrs. Ramsay*, following the principle of the earlier books. But the balance does not weigh down so heavily in favour of women as it did in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The men are competently portrayed; and, on the whole, there is a greater tendency on Mrs. Woolf's part towards an introspective treatment of her characters in *To The Lighthouse* than in any of the earlier novels. Charles Tansley over the dinner-table, and Lily Briscoe's long period of reflection at the end of the book, are good examples of this feature.

This introspective technique is carried as far as it can safely go in *The Waves*. This is a development in every respect upon all Mrs. Woolf's previous work; but how far the development is successful is another matter. Everything is seen through the eyes of six different characters; all the conventional elements of the novel form have been discarded in favour of the introspective method. Mrs. Woolf's handling of this method is satisfactory in itself. There is the usual brilliantly comprehensive assessment of character, especially female character; the usual evidence that the writer's eye is on the object; the usual endowment of seemingly commonplace things with a universal significance. But Mrs. Woolf has not safely escaped the danger from the one danger to which she is bound to be liable, the danger of being ruled by the form she has created for herself in reaction against conventional and dominating shapes. In the formal patterning of the introspective technique of *The Waves*, and particularly in the narrative symbolism of the inter-chapters, the reader misses the perfect union of form and content of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and feels that form is occasionally getting the upper hand. And this impression is strengthened in *The Years*, Mrs. Woolf's latest novel, which is the least successful of the experimental books. In this novel the introspective method is carried beyond the bounds of safety. Mrs. Woolf can point to her remarks, already quoted, about the pattern of life which, she says, may be disconnected and incoherent.



But this pattern is surely not quite as disconnected as *The Years* makes it out to be. Incidents of no possible significance are diligently pursued; there are pages of completely pointless dialogue; questions are asked which are never answered, nor does it seem to matter; remarks lose their direction and wander off into vacuity. Life may be like this; but most of us supply an answer when asked a question, most of us try to give point to our conversation, most of us avoid absent-mindedness in our words. Life, again, may be like this; but the art of the novel is not simply a photographic art; the novelist is expected to do some selecting and arranging; the artist should impose some sort of personal pattern on life. And *The Years* does not do this. What artistic control there is seems to have been employed on purely formal matters; the content has been left to fend for itself. The book as a whole lacks a stiffening alloy of well-selected content; it suffers from too much pure form.

Mrs. Woolf's sheer technical competence is liable to be a disadvantage to her in the long run. The purely formal qualities of her work are often so exquisite that she at last seems fascinated by her own power. This is perhaps a constructive and complimentary way of looking at the matter. A less sympathetic critic might express the same idea by declaring that Mrs. Woolf's work is marred by a distinct weakness of content. Her world is a limited world, a private world. When she is inside it, she is in complete control of the situation. But the circles in which her characters move—the sphere of Mrs. Dalloway and Jinny and Bernard—are very small circles; it is difficult for a novelist to remain in them all the time; and when Mrs. Woolf leaves these circles and passes into the world of Septimus and Rezia Smith, there is an immediate falling off. She never comes to grips with the Smiths. She hovers around them doubtfully, if always sympathetically. Mrs. Woolf's room of her own may have enabled her to achieve the polished excellence of her form and style, but she has had at the same time to shut the door politely on the Smiths. And she declares: “. . . the number of books written by the educated about the working class would seem to show that the glamour of the working class, and the emotional relief afforded by adopting its cause, are to-day as irresistible to the middle class as the glamour of the aristocracy was twenty years ago (see *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*).” Mrs. Woolf's content is thus narrow, the values she discusses are thus limited. Her sense of form is superior to her grasp of content. The defect of an early book like *Mrs. Dalloway* is

never loses touch with them. She always preserves her firm but deft control. It is instructive to contrast Mrs. Ramsay with John Galsworthy's character of Irene in *The Forsyte Saga*. The women play a similar part in the respective novels; they are both the presiding spirits in the action. But whereas Mrs. Woolf treats Mrs. Ramsay introspectively and, without fear of the difficulties of her complex task, gives us this character's thoughts and feelings, Galsworthy evades the issue by merely registering the impact of Irene on the other persons. We never know what she thinks or feels, and in this respect she is a lay-figure when contrasted with the fully rounded character of Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Woolf is less happy with other types of character. In general, she can portray women better than men: Mrs. Dalloway is a much more effective creation than Peter Walsh. And she can portray the characters of Mrs. Dalloway's *milieu*, be they men or women, better than the people in the world of the Smiths. Mr. Ramsay is more convincing than Rezia Smith. It is clearly not sufficient to praise Mrs. Woolf's formal qualities only; the characters of Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay, not to speak of Jacob Flanders and Richard Dalloway and Bernard and Neville and Louis, are enough to show the value of much of her content.

The combination of form and content produces in her prose a particular attitude, a specific tone that is quite distinctive. Much of her charm is due to this tone-quality, which is however very difficult to define and to isolate. Mr. E. M. Forster has described the tone of Sterne and Mrs. Woolf—the conjunction is important—as “a rather deliberate bewilderment, an announcement to all and sundry that they do not know where they are going . . . the parlour door is never mended, the mark on the wall turns out to be a snail, life is such a muddle, oh dear, the will is so weak, the sensations fidgety . . . philosophy . . . God . . . oh dear, look at the mark . . . listen to the door—existence . . . is really too . . . What were we saying?” This sense of bewilderment has doubtless something to do with the tone of Mrs. Woolf, although it is here exaggerated. Her tone is partly bewildered, partly ironic, partly aloof, partly fanciful. It runs through *Mrs. Dalloway*, and is more or less present in all her work, whether creative or critical. Its constant presence is the sign of a well-knit personality. All that Mrs. Woolf writes is typical of her; she rarely speaks out of character. Her social opinions, her literary tastes, her creative writings are all of a piece. They are all marked by one tone, one attitude of mind—the attitude of an educated man's daughter.

Her tone is purely personal to her, and will die with her. But there are other features of her work which are less personal, and therefore more likely to be absorbed in the general tradition of the Novel. The general form of her novels moves, as it were, with the times. Modern novelists, like Mr. Joyce in *Ulysses* and Mr. Huxley in *Eyeless in Giza*, are learning how to make their works superficially free and loose, so that their scope becomes enormously more comprehensive. The Novel, as they have gathered from their own experience and that of Mrs. Woolf, now calls for something more than straightforward dialogue and explanatory narrative. This technique may suit a conception of life as a series of gig-lamps; but when life is seen as a luminous halo, a much more complex medium is needed for the communication of this attitude. And in the novels of James Joyce and Aldous Huxley and Virginia Woolf some such medium is being gradually built up, flexible, comprehensive, suggesting atmosphere instead of conveying information, directly concerned with mental states instead of implying them by the description of external indications, and influenced by the new art-form of the cinema. This new medium is concerned with significant detail and with states of mind. It does not take for granted that "life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small." In this respect, Mr. Joyce and Mrs. Woolf belong to the same tradition, for a tradition it has come to be. And Mrs. Woolf's development of the introspective technique is also clearly in line with this tradition. Charles Tansley at the dinner-table thinks in the style of Stephen Dedalus along the seashore. Compare Tansley's "What damn rot they talk . . . laying down his spoon precisely in the middle of his plate, which he had swept clean . . . For he was not going to talk the sort of rot these people wanted him to talk. He was not going to be condescended to by these silly women"—compare this with Dedalus's "Signatures of things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: colored signs. Limits of the diaphane." Both passages are written in the same idiom, the modern idiom which harks back, remembering Mrs. Woolf's taste for Sterne, to "They order, said I, this matter better in France." This idiom, this tradition, is maintained in Mrs. Woolf's style as well as in her sense of form. The renaissance of language inaugurated by James Joyce has clearly influenced the style, if not the actual vocabulary, of Mrs. Woolf. Both writers exemplify the move-

ment of modern prose towards the richness, the complexity, the internally expanding nature of verse. It is hard to say whether some parts of *Ulysses* or *The Waves* are prose or verse. *The Waves* is a short book, as modern novels go; but this is only because the style enables the subject-matter to be so concentrated. The book has the peculiar concentration of a metaphor; and, indeed, its construction is such that the whole novel is actually a long, extended, elaborate image. It is dangerous to prophesy, but it is at least likely that modern prose will continue to move somewhat in the direction of verse, in the direction of James Joyce and Mrs. Woolf.

As the threads are gathered together, and an attempt is made at a final critical assessment, some help is given by recalling those other novelists with whom Mrs. Woolf has been compared. Her tone is like the bewildered tone of Sterne. Her limited world and her ability to deal with women better than men link her with Jane Austen. Her extensive use of the introspective technique brings her close to Proust, the writer with whom she has probably most in common. Her feeling for language is very similar to that of James Joyce. Mrs. Woolf is a supreme writer when judged by her own standards: Mrs. Dalloway would thoroughly enjoy *The Waves*. She moves in a narrow sphere, but within its bounds she is in perfect control. She understands the personalities of this sphere, and she portrays them with considerable skill and great sympathy. The style and the language are exquisite. But if Mrs. Woolf ventures outside this sphere, if she is handling characters which do not belong to her own world, her touch is less deft, her direction less sure. The style and the language are still there, as poised and as brilliant as ever, but the form is infinitely superior to the content. This is why she has not yet produced a novel which could be confidently claimed as great. There has always been something lacking. Where there is perfection of form, as in *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is a grievous limitation of content. Where the content shows signs of broadening, as in *The Waves*, the form is not quite satisfactory. Each reader will have his own personal preference, but my own is *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is the author's most finished book, even if her most limited.

Mrs. Woolf's excellence, then, is a limited excellence; and any hopes that she would remedy this, as she matured, have been disappointed by her more recent work. *The Years* and *Three Guineas* are unworthy of her, although other writers might have been glad to write them. She has retired still further

into the room of her own, and she is at home only to the daughters of educated men. The reader of *Three Guineas* wishes that she would rent her room for a while, that she would travel, that she would visit town and country, highroad and country-lane, ale-house and market-place. There are a few signs, but only a few, that she has begun her travels in her newest book, the biography of Roger Fry. Her attitude to her subject shows a much greater social consciousness than ever before. She notes continually how her central character questioned Sir Edward Fry's way of life: "The rights of property were respected; class distinctions were upheld; and the pond loafers, with their red neckerchiefs, blowing into their ugly hands, were not to be pitied but blamed. There was, he felt, 'a want of simple humanity' in their upbringing. He revered his parents, his father especially; but they frightened him; and there was much in their way of life that puzzled him." This is a step in the right direction, but it is only a tentative step: Roger Fry himself is still the old familiar child of an educated man. Let her go further, much further afield. Let her go in the mood which inspired Jacob Flanders, her youthful and eager hero. And let her forget for a while the world of the Dalloways, attractive though it may be. She will come back a better novelist, for then she will understand the Smiths. And then she may write a really fine novel, finer than anything she has yet composed, and exchange her present title of important writer for the better one of great novelist.