“Mysterious figures”: character and characterisation in the work of Virginia Woolf

Abstract
This thesis argues for a reading of Virginia Woolf’s work based on notions of character and characterisation as a primary interpretative perspective. The bulk of Woolf scholarship, particularly in recent years, has not been directed towards the study of character, due to both general theoretical discomfort with the category of character, and a sense that Woolf’s work in particular, as that of a feminist and modernist writer, may not respond well to traditional readings of character. However, Woolf’s exploration of the human self and its relations with other people is best understood by looking at her formal experiments in characterisation. Her writing was consistently engaged with questions of character, as an examination of her early journalism makes clear. In the years before the publication of her first novel, Woolf articulated a broad theory of character in her reviews of contemporary literature and in essays on Gissing and Dostoyevsky. In The Voyage Out, Woolf began a writing career of experiment in character, examining a continuum of character ranging from complete nonidentification to a consuming over-identification. A key element here is the introduction of the Theophrastan type as an alternative form of fictional characterisation that corresponds to a way of knowing real people. In Jacob’s Room, Woolf continued to focus on the speculative nature of characterisation and its demands for imaginative identification demonstrated by her short story collection Monday & Tuesday. The importance of this issue is clear from the debates she engaged in with Arnold Bennett during the 1920s, a debate re-framed in this paper as focussing on characterisation. Jacob’s Room initiates a quest for an elusive ‘essence’ of character that may, or may not, exist outside of the structuring forms of social life, and may or may not be accessible through speculative imaginative identification. This elusive essence of character is a primary focus of Mrs. Dalloway, a novel which explores the ways the self can be shaped under social pressures into more permanent and stable structures. This is explored in the novel in a series of metaphors circling around treasure and jewels. While alert to the role of exterior factors, including time and memory, the novel maintains at least the possibility that some more internal form of the self exists and can be represented in fiction. This possibility is explored further in Woolf’s short story cycle Mrs. Dalloway’s Party, and leads into To the Lighthouse’s study of character and its ability to represent essential or internal aspects of self, the self as it exists in relation to other selves, and ultimately a projected or created version of character that reconciles this complexity. This is again carried out through the use of a extensive chain of metaphors which function symbolically in the text, and through a meditation on the nature of the relationship between real people and their fictional counterparts. While the novel offers no clear resolution, it gestures towards a type of characterisation, and hence a type of relationship, based on limited understanding and acceptance. This notion is picked up in The Waves, a novel which both explores the continuity of the self as represented by character over time - something that is also important in The Years - and explores the ways that characters can be represented and the implications this has for the types of unity that can, for good or for ill, be achieved. Again, a notion of a limited character, closer in form to caricature than to the whole and rounded characters often associated with Woolf, is proposed by the novel as a possible solution to the problem of character. In Woolf’s last two novels, The Years and Between the Acts, many of these themes reappear, and Woolf simultaneously situates her characters more firmly than ever in a comprehensible physical and social context, and uses them to explore areas where language and rationality cease to function.

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Gilbert Clandon: He is a stock and flat character. He is a stock character because in those times we can see a lot of Gilberts in terms of being arrogant and patriarchal one. Also as I said before he is a flat character because he is always busy with her business. However, the more he becomes more absorbed in his work, the more she feels lonely. On the other hand, she still wants to have a baby from Gilbert not only get rid of loneliness but also cheer her perfect Gilbert up. After she spends time with B.M, her life, her vision everything changes for her. She grows up mentally and reaches a certain knowledge about life by the help of B.M's perspective and maybe the books she reads. "Virginia Woolf's peculiarities as a fiction writer have tended to obscure her central strength: she is arguably the major lyrical novelist in the English language. Her novels are highly experimental: a narrative, frequently uneventful and commonplace, is refracted—and sometimes almost dissolved—in the characters' receptive consciousness. Laura Marcus argues that the relationship between Virginia Woolf and feminism is of a symbiotic character. She explains how Woolf's works, both the fictional and the theoretical, centre around women: women's lives and histories, but also how feminist criticism has altered our perception and reception of Woolf as a writer (Marcus 209). Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf study guide contains a biography of Edward Albee, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. Her shocked, upstanding father quickly annulled the marriage though it was consummated and brought her home, where she reveled in the power of playing hostess for her widowed father. She chose George, believing he had potential to become the head of the history department and eventually to replace her father as president of the university. George's failure to rise to this position is her biggest disappointment, and she refuses to let her husband see just how much of a disappointment he is to her. In order to actually understand Virginia Woolf's true motives and her opinions on feminism, emancipation and the Women's Movement as well as the Suffrage Movement, however, her work has to be set into the context of both, her life and the time she was living in. It is necessary to uncover the many facets of Virginia Woolf for she was a woman who was not easily understood. Often very different, sometimes even opposing, points of view on one and the same topic can be found throughout her work, a fact which can simply be explained by the natural changing of one's perspective during a lifetime due Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on January 25, 1882, and died by suicide on March 28, 1941. Writing famous works such as The Lighthouse, The Voyage Out, and Mrs. Dalloway, she is considered one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century. Born in London to Julia and Leslie Stephen, Virginia was one of four children. In James King's book Virginia Woolf, he notes that, “Virginia had mixed feelings about domestics. Like many members of the upper and professional classes, she had been born into a family which employed large numbers of servants” (King 231).