

# Re-thinking Human Life into Poetry

Virginia Woolf 's

*The Waves*

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Claude Monet, Rising tide at Pourville, 1882

Brooklyn Museum, New York

## Acknowledgements

To me, writing this thesis has become a source of inspiration out of which there seems more to draw.

Virginia Woolf's language holds so many treasures that one feels there is always something new and fresh waiting to be brought out.

I feel grateful for the opportunities I have had to get to know the author and her works. My interest in her language grew when I was a student of speech and drama in London.

I wish to express my gratitude to my adviser, Professor Jakob Lothe, for his positive response, useful advice and encouraging comments.

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Nesodden, 1 May 2008

*it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right, making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we-I mean all human beings-are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.*

Virginia Woolf, 'Moments of Being'

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Virginia Woolf, <i>The Waves</i> and Modernism.....	1
Theory.....	6
Method.....	17
Outline of chapters.....	18
<b>Chapter 2: Narrative techniques</b>	
The Waves: novel- poem and play-poem.....	20
The lonely mind and Bernard the narrator.....	23
The moment in states of consciousness.....	28
The monologue in streams of consciousness.....	32
Rhythm and musical elements.....	35
<b>Chapter 3: Imagery and symbol</b>	
Character as metaphor.....	44
Louis.....	46
Rhoda.....	48
Jinny.....	50
Susan.....	52
Neville.....	54
Bernard.....	56
Shared imagery and symbols.....	59
<b>Chapter 4: Poetry and silence</b>	
Poetry speaks: The Interludes.....	69
The silent world.....	73
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Appendix: Handwritten manuscript pages of <i>The Waves</i>.....</b>	<b>88</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will explore the experimental poetic discourse of *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf, including narrative and dramatic aspects. My discussion takes its cue from Virginia Woolf's own attempt to write to a 'rhythm and not to a plot' (Letters IV, 1978, 204) The author claims that she is 'not trying to tell a story.' Rhythm, plot and story are therefore central problems for my discussion. The analysis concerns itself with the narration of the novel, how the text is written and communicated, including narrative devices which contribute to constituting the discourse. The emphasis, however, will be on the poetic style of the prose. Poetry is used as imagery regarding the characters in *The Waves*, but it is also used to create a framework for the characters' lives, as in *The Interludes*. The aspects of form and style, which specifically concern me in this thesis are the use of monologue and various kinds of figurative language, like 'leitmotifs' or 'spatial form', metaphor, metonymy and symbolic structures. The words and sentences of *The Interludes* will be discussed on a more detailed level, and at the same time they will be viewed in the light of the overall poetic atmosphere.

According to Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* is not only a 'novel-poem,' it is also a 'play-poem'.<sup>1</sup> The suggested genres raise questions of *story*, *plot* and *character*: Does the novel provide a story, and by what means does the author create plot and character? These issues will be discussed as well as various literal devices related to the 'stream of consciousness' technique, soliloquy and interior monologue, narrator, imagery and symbols, rhythm and musical structure.<sup>2</sup> The author's experimental devices replace the traditional narrative structure of the 'story' as a mere sequence of events in time. The individual images and symbols of characters will be viewed in the light of the characters' common consciousness. Thus they build a totality in which symbolic meaning is hidden.

### Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* and Modernism

Adeleine Virginia Stephen was born 25 January 1882. Writing, and specifically the writing of fiction became essential to her way of being, already as a very young girl. She began to write down her stories for the 'Hyde Park Gate News', a weekly 'newspaper' which the Stephen children produced for their parents between 1891 and 1895. It contained family news and drawings by her sister Vanessa as well as Virginia's stories. Writing was a craft she wanted to master.

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<sup>1</sup> In an article of 1931 on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the author refers to *The Waves* as 'novel-poem', quoted in *The Waves*: 'Introduction', xx.

<sup>2</sup> My most important critical terms are defined below, see p. 6-17

Growing up was hard for Virginia, especially as so many of her close relations, on whom her emotional needs for love and recognition depended, died. As a thirteen year-old, she lost her mother, Julia Stephen. Two years later her step-sister died. Her father, Leslie Stephen, who was the editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*, died when Virginia was twenty-two years old. Two years later her brother, Toby, to whom she was closely attached, died of typhoid. He had been at Cambridge with Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell (who married her sister) and Leonard Woolf. These deaths resulted in, or at least contributed to, Virginia's mental breakdowns which she suffered from throughout her life.

With her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, Virginia Woolf was drawn into the company of writers, philosophers and artists known as The Bloomsbury Group. Here she met Leonard Woolf, whom she married in 1912. The Woolfs were at the centre of the Bloomsbury Group whose circle included Clive and Vanessa Bell, Maynard and Lydia Keynes, E.M.Forster, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry and Bertrand Russell. By this time she wrote reviews for *The Times Literary Supplement*, and she had started to work on her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which was published in 1915. Leonard and Virginia Woolf bought a hand press and taught themselves typesetting. This had a therapeutic effect on Virginia. The Hogarth Press was founded in 1917. A pioneering press, it was to publish her work as well as the work of T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster and Katherine Mansfield. This press gave her the freedom to write what she wanted, without having to satisfy the needs of other editors. 'I'm the only woman in England free to write', she says in her diary. More than most authors, Virginia Woolf wrote her life. Her day was a schedule of different writings: handwritten composing in the morning, typing drafts in the afternoon, diary after tea and sometimes letters in the evening. Writing was her life, and it was the activity which mattered more to her than anything else.

Unusually and characteristically, all her books use different narrative techniques. *Night and Day* appeared in 1919, *Monday and Tuesday* in 1921. In *Jacob's Room* (1922) which was inspired by her brother Toby, and in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), she perfected her experimental style. E.M. Forster remarked of Mrs Dalloway that her essentially poetic method had been applied to fiction. From then on Woolf's fiction became a series of extraordinarily varied experiments, each one searching for a fresh way of presenting the relationship between individual lives and the forces of society and history. With *To the Lighthouse* (1927) which was inspired by her parents and her own childhood, and *The Waves* (1931), the author developed her poetic style through the method of 'stream of consciousness.' *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), which was a historical fantasy written for Vita Sackville West, was her greatest commercial success. Woolf also wrote another biography, called *Flush* (1933). She

was particularly concerned with women's experience, not only in her novels but also in her essays and her two books of feminist polemic, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Other novels were *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941) Among her short stories were *A Haunted House and Other Stories*. (1943)

Virginia Woolf divided her time between London and Rodmell village in the South Downs, West Sussex. In 1941, fearing another attack of mental illness, she drowned herself.

*The Waves* has a well documented history. Virginia Woolf worked intensively on her original 'play-poem' for almost two years. Essays and diary entries suggest that she had it in mind for an even longer period of time. In 1928, when *Orlando* was published, she had serious plans to start writing its 'abstract poetic' or 'abstract mystical' counterpart. She wrote the whole text at least three times, from beginning to end.

I will now introduce the novel:

The novel is an exploration of the workings of the minds of the six named characters: Bernard, Rhoda, Jinny, Louis, Neville and Susan. The life-span of the six characters from their shared childhood and schooldays through to Bernard's death, is conveyed through a series of 'dramatic soliloquies', interspersed with beautifully written passages describing shifting patterns of light and water passing from dawn to dusk and spring to winter. The soliloquies express the characters' inner feelings, especially their doubts and fears. A seventh character, Percival, never speaks but is important to all the others. The characters do not speak to each other, but through some shared experiences, there is some kind of communication. As they meet to celebrate Percival's departure for India, they express different emotional states and views of the world. After the death of Percival, there is a change taking place in the minds of the characters. During the course of the novel we hear that Louis becomes a successful business man and takes Rhoda as his lover. She subsequently commits suicide. Susan marries a farmer and has children. Jinny leads an active social life in London, moving from one young man to another. Neville is intensely private, relating only to one person at a time. Bernard marries and has a family. He struggles to write, and he ponders on the nature of life and death and questions his own identity. The characters come together when they are much older. Bernard, feeling his failure, wonders what the others have achieved in life. His only sense is that the beating of the waves is an indicator of the universality of death. It is not the external facts that matter in *The Waves*, but much more the way the inner life of the soul is conveyed in a poetic way.

The reason why I chose this particular novel by Virginia Woolf, was my interest in the poetic aspect of the novel and the variation of narrative techniques. My four year training in epic, lyric and dramatic speech in London has contributed to my interest in the combination of the dramatic and lyric styles of the novel. As a student of speech I used to speak passages from the beautifully lyric interludes, as a part of my speech exercise practice. The transparent quality of the language fascinated me. The sounds and atmosphere of the interludes became a source of inspiration for my artistic work, and now, for this thesis.



With the modernist era (1890-1940) a new consciousness arose in the human mind, affecting all art; painting, music and literature. According to Gertrude Stein, Modernism involved a 'new disposition of space and time'. In literature this consciousness manifests itself in new writing techniques and a renewal of style. The artistic consciousness becomes more intuitive and poetic. The artist explores his imaginative and innovative power. Virginia Woolf's novels are in some sense fictional inheritances from French Symbolist poetry, and they may be placed in the same category as the novels of James, Proust, Joyce, Conrad and Faulkner. *The Waves*, being Virginia Woolf's most innovative novel, according to Melvin Friedman, can be placed within the Symbolist Novel (Friedman 1991, 460). There are certain devices in Symbolist fiction which can be recognized in Virginia Woolf's experimental writing. In Zola's novels there is, for example, an omniscient storyteller who intrudes at regular intervals. Zola used 'repetition' in his novels and connected them to Wagnerian 'leitmotifs'. Rimbaud emphasized the need for the poet to explore the inner self, reorder perceptions of existence and thereby become a visionary. The Symbolist Movement, says Arthur Symons, was an attempt to spiritualize literature. It endeavoured to engage in the ultimate essence, the soul, of what could be realized by the consciousness, searching for symbols by which the soul of things could be made visible. Description was banished that beautiful things might be evoked, magically. The regular beat of verse was broken in order that words might fly upon subtler wings. Mystery was no longer feared, as 'the great mystery in whose midst we are islanded was feared by those to whom that unknown sea was only a great void.' It was a revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition (Symons 2001, 146).

This new novel, says Friedman, was less concerned with telling a story sequentially and delineating character vertically from birth to death, and more willing to fragment narrative and to chop up experience into small blocks of time, connected through repeated images and symbols rather than through outer events. Between 1930 and 1933, there was a reaction against Symbolist fiction. This period marked the late stage of the modernist epoch, and this was the time when *The Waves* was written.

There was a radical change in the form of the introverted novel and a desire to free the narrative from its earlier limitations, from its flat, external realism and its dependence on the material world. Modernist artists wanted to explore more freely the effect that life itself had on their writing. Virginia Woolf expressed this desire in the famous essay 'Modern Fiction'. Here she claimed that the writer of novels seems constrained by 'some powerful and

unscrupulous tyrant' who has him in his grip, expecting him to provide a plot, to provide comedy or tragedy (MF in GR, 1948, 188). She related writing fiction to life itself: 'Look within life', she says:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a *free man* and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon *his own feelings* and not upon convention, there would be *no plot*, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from beginning to end'.(ibid, 189, my italics)

The author compares life to literature, and comments that life is not symmetrically arranged in a line. She suggests that we are enveloped by life and light. Life, which she describes as a semi-transparent envelope, may also within the context of her writing in *Granite and Rainbow* be related to 'spirit'. Woolf's fiction was placed within the flow of human consciousness, and *consciousness* itself was defined as a kind of 'aesthetic'. It was to be considered a poeticized, subjective vision in which we all live, an unconditioned state of reverie and awareness similar to that of the artist. Consequently, the modern novel became the novel of fine consciousness. It escaped the conventions of fact-giving and story-telling, and it transcended the limitations of realism to serve a higher realism. The modern novel did not only strive for poetic freedom but also to be true to the *feel of life*. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) are novels of pattern and rhythm rather than plot. In these novels the central characters associate and co-operate with the consciousness of the author. The author described this process thus: 'I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness'. Her style redefined all the significant elements of the novel, like story and plot. Virginia Woolf abandoned the convention of the 'story' as she abandoned the convention of 'character drawing'. Neither of them would be able to express life, as she saw it. She explored the relationship between author and character, the characters' relationship to time, which comes to expression in their thoughts (Fletcher 1991, 408-9). From one point of view, the 'stream of consciousness' technique was a means of escape from the tyranny of the time dimension. The new method of describing states of mind became a new technique of story-telling (Daiches 1967, 16).

## Theory

For my analysis I have used *The Two Holograph Drafts of The Waves*, edited and transcribed by J. W. Graham, Virginia Woolf's *Diary* and *A Writer's Diary* (edited by Leonard Woolf) as parallel reading to *The Waves*. Regarding literary terms, I have mainly used M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. As sources for my analytic approach I have used various articles from literary magazines, such as the *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Modern Fiction Studies* and the *Toronto Quarterly magazine*, as well as articles collected in books, like for example the Harold Bloom edition of *Modern Critical Views: Virginia Woolf*.

This theoretical part deals with literary terms that are central to *The Waves* as narrative. The terms will be illustrated by some examples from the text, and they will be referred to in the analysis.

### Author and narrator

Hillis Miller distinguishes between the *author* of and the *narrator* in a narrative:

A distinction must be made here, as always, between Virginia Woolf sitting at her desk with a blank sheet of paper before her, composing *To the Lighthouse*, extending the line of words further and further out into the void of not-yet-written-on paper, and, on the other hand, the imagined and the imagery narrator of the novel. The latter is a different person, located in a different place, and possesses quite different powers. (Miller 1990, 155)

The author is primarily the writer, the producer of the text of narrative fiction, or as Virginia Woolf comments on her own role as author: 'I am the judge, I am the seer. I am the force that arranges. I am the thing in which all exists' (Draft 1, 39). The author stands outside the literary universe he/she creates by means of language, but there is at the same time an intimate connection between the author and the text. The relationship is influenced by the literary technique used by the author (Lothe 2000, 18).

The *narrator*, however, is an integral part of the narrative text. He/she does not exist outside the linguistic structure which constitutes him/her but functions as the author's narrative instrument in presenting and developing the text. And as Miller points out, the narrator possesses certain powers and helps the author to constitute and communicate the text. The narrator can also be an active character in the plot, as in *The Waves* where Bernard is the novel's main narrator and yet also a character.

If the narrator may speak as a first- person narrator, he is to a greater or lesser degree participating in the action. In a third-person narrative, the narrator stands outside the action and refers to all the other characters in the plot by name, or as 'he', 'she' or 'they'.

The omniscient narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents, actions and events. He has a privileged access to the characters' thoughts. The omniscient narrator may choose to be intrusive and comment on or evaluate the actions and motives of the characters, or he may choose to be impersonal and unintrusive (Abrams 2005, 240).

In *The Waves* we find examples of the omniscient narrator, represented by the writing lady, the lonely mind and Bernard who acts as the main narrator. Bernard serves as a narrative instrument to mediate the author's perception of life, and at the same time he is a central character who has the function of describing the 'nature' of all the other characters. The narrator Bernard is the one through whom all the others are seen, as when he says: 'With Neville, let's discuss Hamlet. With Louis, science. With Jinny, love' (TW, 197). In Neville's words 'We are all phrases in Bernard's story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B'. Apart from acting as storyteller, Bernard also mediates the author's intentions regarding the *literary style* of the novel, as when he describes the feeling of writing to a rhythm:

Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain (*the rhythm is the main thing in writing*). Now without pausing I will begin, on the very lilt of the stroke – (TW, 58, my italics)

The other characters in *The Waves* are also narrators speaking either as third- person narrators, as they speak indirectly, or in the first person.

### Narrative, story and plot

A *narrative* is a story told in prose or verse, involving events, characters and what the characters say and do. Daniel D. Hutto specifies the term, by adding 'complex representations that relate and describe the course of some unique series of events in a coherent but selective arrangement' (Hutto 2007, 1). A novel, as literary form, is a narrative told by one narrator or a number of narrators, as in *The Waves*. A narrative text consists of a narrative structure, which includes an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and a coda at the end. This does not mean that a story has to include all these components in order to be a story, but the complicating action is a requirement. A 'complicating action' includes 'sentences in which the all-important and ordered events of the narrative are reported.' (Toolan 1998, 137-8).

In *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster defines the *story* as ‘a narrative of events arranged in a time sequence’ (Forster 1970, 36). In *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, Jakob Lothe adds: *Story* refers to the narrated events and conflicts in narrative fiction, abstracted from their disposition in the discourse and arranged chronologically together with the fictional characters’. The events and conflicts can in other words be arranged chronologically (Lothe 2000, 6). *Story* is therefore related to the ‘summary of the action’ in the narrative, or in the Russian Formalist’s language, the *fabula*. According to some theorists, there must be an ending relating back to the beginning, an ending that indicates what happened to the desire that initiated the events the story narrates.

Forster also adds that in order to reach a fuller understanding of the nature of the *story*, we have to consider its connection to life. In life we think that one event occurs before or after another. But there is something else besides time, something which may be called ‘value’, something which is not measured by minutes or hours, but by intensity. When we look at our past it does not stretch back evenly but piles up into a few notable pinnacles. When we look at the future it seems sometimes a wall, sometimes a cloud, sometimes a sun, but never a chronological chart. Moreover, Forster claims that ‘what the story does is to narrate the life in time’ (Forster 1970, 36). In *The Waves*, the author seeks to describe the intensity of moments in the characters’ lives, and the moments represent fragments of time. These fragments are not built up chronologically but as scenes structured in rhythmic sequences. In *The Waves*, the author narrates life, but the aspect of time is complex. We follow the lives of six individuals, but the moments are measured by their intensity and not as a time sequence.

The story’s main concern is the way *plot* is structured (Abrams 2005, 181). While the story represents a chronologically ordered synopsis of events, *plot* is constituted by the narrative’s events and actions aimed at maximising an artistic and emotional effect. It may create a tragic or comic effect, or it may create a conflict between individuals or a conflict within one individual against his opposing desires or aims. Generally, a *plot* is said to have unity of action, or incidents, where, according to Aristotle, all the parts are so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any of them will disjoint and dislocate the whole (*Poetics*, section 8). Aristotle says that plot is the most basic feature of a narrative, that good stories must have a beginning, middle and an end, and that they give pleasure because of this order. If we talk about events that have been shaped into a plot, it is to highlight the plot’s meaningfulness and organization. We have inferred the plot from the text. Essentially, a plot requires transformation. There must be an initial situation, a change and a resolution that

marks the change as significant. In my analysis, I consider plot as the inner conflicts of a person's life, and in *The Waves* these conflicts are represented by all the six characters. The transformation of a plot will therefore not be viewed in a traditional sense, by a change of outer events followed by a resolution. In *The Waves*, the transformation of plot is represented as symbols which may reveal a transformation on an inner level.

According to Lothe, the Russian formalists' concept of *syuzhet* refers to the oral or written design of the story, to the different procedures and devices in the text. It is the concrete representation used to convey the story (Lothe 2000, 7). Peter Brooks links *syuzhet* directly to *plot*, which for him is the 'dynamic shaping force in the narrative discourse'. This way of looking at plot adds a new and important dimension to the concept. It may, in my view, include other dynamic creative forces in the discourse, such as inner conflicts. In *The Waves* these inner conflicts are related to moments in the characters' lives when they struggle to live in the present because they experience a transient state of consciousness. Inner soul conflicts, caused by *fear* as in Louis' and Rhoda's lives or *love* on a physical level as in Jinny's life, contribute to shaping important plots in *The Waves*.

Brooks points out that plot is that which makes us read forward, unfolding the narrative as 'a line of intention.' He refers to a number of different ways one might go about discussing the concept of plot and its function in the range of narrative forms (Brooks 1996, 10-15). He claims that, in a poetic work, plot is of a different nature than plot in a novel. This is an important observation in the context of my argument. Brooks points out that lyric poetry strives toward an ideal simultaneously, encouraging us to read backwards and forwards through rhyme and repetition, which then creates *one* visual and auditory image. It may have a narrative which generally seeks an atemporal structure of understanding (ibid, 20-21). In *The Waves* plot is certainly structured in this poetic way, where the characters' struggling moments are reinforced by repetition of images, words and sentences, like 'leitmotifs', and by 'rhythm'.

### Discourse and style

As a contrast to *style* and *stylistics* which are concerned with units of language isolated from the specific circumstances of utterance, *discourse* is concerned with language which continues over a number of sentences and involves the interaction of writer/speaker and reader/auditor in a specific situational context and within a framework of social and cultural conventions (Abrams 2005, 66). Relating discourse to events, Lothe claims that discourse is the spoken or written presentation of the events. In discourse, the order of events is not necessarily

chronological; people are presented through characterization, communicated through narrative voices and perspectives (Lothe 2000, 6). A text is embedded in a context of a situation, says M.A.K. Halliday, and he points out that text, or discourse, is a continuous progression of meanings, combining both simultaneously and in succession (Halliday 1979, 122). In my discussion on narrative, dramatic and poetic devices, I consider these aspects of the discourse. A simultaneous progression of meanings may, in my view, refer to poetry, and a successive progression may apply to a narrated story.

On a deeper linguistic level, three aspects of *discourse* can be distinguished. The term refers to *activity*, or ‘what is going on’. The second reference is *mode*, or how the spoken or written text is being communicated. If it is spoken, then how is it spoken, spontaneously or non-spontaneously, in a conversing, monologuing or ‘reciting’ style? Is the text to be heard (to be read as speech) or read (as if thought) The third reference is *tenor*, which is relevant when cultural aspects of language have to be considered, ‘what is language used for? Is the speaker trying to persuade? To discipline or instruct?’ These three aspects of discourse are interdependent (Hatim and Mason 1990, 48). In *The Waves*, *mode* is the most central aspect of the discourse. It is not always easy to follow ‘what is going on’, but much more relevant to analyse how the text is communicated, how the speeches in their monologuing style are spoken, as they are meant to be communicated to an audience.<sup>3</sup>

As indicated already, the concept of *style* has traditionally been concerned with isolated units of language, like *words*, *phrases*, *sentences* and *figures*, separated from the specific circumstances of an utterance. The author’s particular choice and combination of *words*, *grammar*, *figures of speech*, which are the rhetorical devices the author uses to give imaginative expression to the work. These include *metaphor*, *symbol*, and *tone* which represent the author’s attitude to the subject revealed in the manner of writing. All these features of the text contribute to style. The rich imagery in *The Waves* creates the inner life of the characters as well as an overall atmosphere, as in the interludes. Each character is tied to his/ her own symbol, Susan with her green eyes symbolizing jealousy, Louis with his stamping beast symbolizing fear. Rhoda’s leaping tiger symbolizes her fear, and Bernard’s rings of smoke symbolize the illusion of his phrasemaking. Jinny’s passionate love is symbolized by the dancing flame and Neville’s intellect, order and exactness is symbolized by the image of the knife. These images are used in different ways throughout the novel. They serve as leitmotifs and represent the substance of each character’s soul life

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<sup>3</sup> See ‘Stream of consciousness’ below.

## Stream of consciousness

The term *stream of consciousness* is central to the work of Virginia Woolf. I have therefore extended the term as it affects the style of the monologue in the *Waves*. Many critics refer to this term as *interior monologue*. According to Abrams, *stream of consciousness* was originally used to ‘describe the unbroken flow of perceptive memories, thoughts and feelings in the waking mind’ (Abrams 2005, 307-8). Melvin Friedman is one of the critics who consider *The Waves* the most firmly rooted in the ‘stream of consciousness’ style of all her books, in which ‘the characters flow on, as from the inside, with no authorial interpolations’ (Friedman 1955, 122).

The stream of consciousness writer is not concerned with plot of action in an ordinary sense. He is concerned with psychic processes and not physical actions. If the stream of consciousness writer cannot draw on the conventional use of plot to provide a necessary unity, he must devise some other methods. Therefore, stream of consciousness fiction is possessed of characteristic formal patterns. Robert Humphrey classifies them according to several types. The types which have relevance for *The Waves* are:

1. Unities (time, place, character, action)
2. Leitmotifs
3. Formal scenic arrangements
4. Symbolic structures
5. Natural cyclical schemes (musical structures, cycles of history etc.  
(Humphrey 1972, 86)

In my view, the most characteristic patterns in *The Waves* are *leitmotifs*, *formal scenic arrangements* and *symbolic structures*. Humphrey adds that *The Waves* is built on a broad symbolic pattern, and he emphasizes that the main structural device of the novel is one of formal scenic arrangements, combined with the symbolic force of rising and falling tides, the rising and falling sun and the continuous moving waves on the shore. The formal scenic arrangement serves as a substitute for the lack of time, unity and plot, since each scene carries its own unity of time and the whole book is connected by the symbolic descriptions between the scenes (ibid. 103-4). The author says in her diary that she wanted to run the scenes together more, by rhythm (Diary III, 30 December 1930, 343). In this thesis, *leitmotif* is discussed in ‘Character as metaphor’. *Symbolic structures* are developed in ‘Shared imagery and symbols’. *Cyclic schemes* and *rhythm* are discussed in ‘Rhythm and musical elements’.

David Daiches claims that the relation of consciousness to time is *not* the simple one of events to time; it is independent of chronological sequence in a way that events are not



(Daiches 1967, 16). This observation can be related to Georges Poulet's description of experience and time:

All or life, and especially in our childhood, with all our perceptions, images and feelings, and whatever ideas we have had, persist in our minds; but as we are living in duration, it is not permitted to us to have anything but rare glimpses, disconnected reminiscences, of this treasure stored in a remote place in our soul (Poulet 1954, 15).

Poulet points out that *time* is not only experienced as *thought* but as the very essence of our being. 'We are not only living *in* time, we *are* time' (ibid, 3). The glimpses which he describes as 'disconnected reminiscences', refer to the phenomenon captured in the stream of consciousness method. This method arose out of a new realization of the complex and fluid nature of consciousness and the desire to utilize this realization in the portrayal of character. It is therefore not only an adequate method for describing states of mind, because it has implications for the whole technique of character drawing.

Wolfgang Iser points out that our notion of time is utterly dependent on the human self. The self can be identified by its states of consciousness placed in time, and past and present can never be completely synthesized:

Is it that which existed in the circumstances of the past, is it that which it is at the moment in the present, or is it simply that force which constantly creates new connections and time relations but which, at the same time, constantly plunges every one of its visible manifestations into the maelstrom of *change*? The self is essentially incapable of completion, and this fact accounts both for its inadequacy and its richness. The knowledge that it can never be completely in possession of itself is the hallmark of consciousness.  
(Iser 1978, 144, 145, my italics)

'With which of its states then', he asks 'is the *self* to be *identified*?' In *The Waves*, Woolf describes states of consciousness which are enriched by the past and the present. In *A Sketch of the Past* she questions whether things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our mind. She seeks to invent a device which can capture this phenomenon (MOB, 67). The emphasis on the change and continuity of the individual identity is of central importance to our understanding of her work. The question: 'With which of its states is the self to be identified?' concerns most characters in *The Waves*. However, the issue of identity, change and self concerns Bernard most of all.<sup>4</sup>

For Humphrey, *stream of consciousness* is a variety of psychological fiction. The technical differences from writer to writer and novel to novel can be reconciled by regarding them as slightly different means to get at the same end. He regards four techniques as the

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3: 'Character as metaphor': Bernard, and 'Shared imagery and symbols'.

instruments for the stream of consciousness technique; *direct* and *indirect interior monologue*, the *omniscient treatment* and *soliloquy* (Humphrey 1959, 2- 3).

The *soliloquy* presents the psychic content and processes of a character directly from character to reader without the presence of an author, but with an assumed audience. The point of view is always the character's, and the level of consciousness is usually close to the surface. Hence it is more limited in the depth of consciousness that it can represent than in interior monologue (ibid, 36). According to Humphrey, *soliloquy* must 'communicate emotions and ideas which are related to the plot and action'. We know that the stream of consciousness writer is more concerned with psychic processes than plot in an ordinary sense. J. W. Graham claims that the soliloquies in *The Waves* are the plot. The plot is, in my view, the 'inner' drama taking place within the characters' minds. Humphrey applies the style of *soliloquy* to *The Waves*. Woolf herself spoke about *The Waves* as a 'series of soliloquies.'<sup>5</sup>

Edouard Dujardin is named by Joyce as the originator of the *interior monologue*. He defines the technique as 'the speech of a character in a scene, having for its object to introduce us directly into the interior life of that character, without authorial intervention through explanations or commentaries; ...it differs from traditional monologue in that: in its manner, it is the expression of the most intimate thought that lies nearest the unconscious; in its form, it is produced in its direct phrases reduced to the minimum of syntax' (Dujardin 1931, 58-9).

The *soliloquy* differs from the *interior monologue* in that, although spoken *solus*, it nevertheless is represented with the assumption of a formal and immediate audience. In my view, it is this characteristic feature which distinguishes it most clearly from interior monologue. Another characteristic feature of soliloquy is greater coherence, as its purpose is to communicate emotions and ideas related to *plot* and action, whereas the purpose of the interior monologue is primarily to communicate psychic identity.

Laurence Bowling offers a narrow definition of the stream of consciousness technique, and Robert Humphrey believes that the term embraces several different methods. Bowling applies two levels of consciousness to the stream of consciousness technique (Bowling 1950, 339-40). On the one hand, *the interior monologue* should apply to the level of mental life which is nearest to ordinary speech. It describes the part of a character's interior life *farthest from* the unconscious. It is devoted to the verbal area of the mind and does not take into account images and sensations. He adds that it should be more formal than ordinary speech

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<sup>5</sup> AWD: 'The Waves is I think resolving itself into a series of dramatic soliloquies', 159.

(ibid, 334-6). On another level, the stream of consciousness technique may focus on *images* and *sensory impressions*. To embrace these impressions, the technique implies that sentences become fragmentary and elliptic.

Let us take an example from the text to illustrate the two levels of consciousness which Bowling attempts to include. The first example of Louis' speech in *The Waves* is, in my view, devoted to the verbal area of the mind. It is written in a more formal style than that of a child. Nevertheless, it does take images into account. The second version is applied to a more sensory impressionistic style, allowing the mind to pause and focus on the sensations:

1. 'Now they have all gone', said Louis. 'I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early, before lessons. Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters.' (TW, p. 7)
2. They have all gone...I am left among the flowers...flowers...green...petals. Stalks rising...blackness...flowers, like fishes...light...dark....green....

Stream of consciousness is, for Bowling, a mixture of interior monologue and sensory impression. It includes all conscious mental processes, including 'non-language phenomena as images and impressions'. It incorporates interior monologue, and it includes other mental activity (Naremore 1973, 67). But in my view, Bowling does not distinguish soliloquy from interior monologue. The two levels of interior monologue, may in my view be applied to soliloquy *and* interior monologue. The part of a character's speech which is farthest from the unconscious and is devoted to the verbal area of the mind should, in my view, be applied to *soliloquy*.

In spite of disagreements between Humphrey and Bowling, they do concur on two fundamental points: first, that stream of consciousness is especially concerned with an essentially disorganized part of the mind; second, that stream of consciousness fiction always focuses on the contents of a character's mind at a given point in space and time, in order to suggest a record of thought as it occurs, as it 'rises out of a circumstantial context' (ibid., 70).

In practice, the purpose of the stream of consciousness novel which employs soliloquy is sometimes achieved by the combination of soliloquy and interior monologue. The emphasis is on *soliloquy*, because the characters are talking to themselves while they are alone with an assumed audience. Sometimes they are oblivious to any hearers present. Other times the reader is aware of the character's conscious effort to be 'heard' by an audience. If one reads *The Waves* within the setting of an audience, as one listens to the characteristic style of the

speeches, one gets the impression that the characters' speak out into a silent space. This space is seemingly empty, but as audience we feel the space is filled with light, colour and darkness. The effect, however, is that the style of soliloquy creates a feeling of loneliness. In the first draft of *The Two Holograph Drafts*, the author refers to the monologues as soliloquies: 'These soliloquies will some day be shared' (Draft II, 441). Occasionally the reader is able to overhear the characters' flow of thought as they are represented as images and sense impressions as in interior monologue. I will illustrate the styles of soliloquy and interior monologue with examples in my analysis of: 'The monologue in streams of consciousness'.<sup>6</sup>

### Poetic imagination, metaphor, metonymy and symbol

To understand *The Waves* as a work of literature presupposes an understanding of the nature of poetic language, why metaphors are used and how they are created. The language of poetry makes abundant use of figures of speech.

Aristotle argued that poetry provides a safe outlet for the release of intense emotions. And he claimed that poetry models the valuable experience of passing from ignorance to knowledge. Wordsworth described good poetry, at the moment of composition, as 'spontaneous overflow of feeling'. He claimed that the essential material of a poem was the inner feelings of the author. Blake and Shelley described a poem as an embodiment of the poet's imaginary vision. Coleridge developed an organic theory of the imaginary process, where the poetic product is based on a seed-like idea in the poet's imagination, which then grows by assimilating both the poet's feelings and sense-experience, and evolves into an organic whole, in which the parts are related to each other and to the whole (Abrams 1993, 5).

To approach poetry, it is necessary to consider the significance of poetic *imagination*, the process which precedes the poetic product. Owen Barfield clarifies this concept of *imagination*:

There is a certain kind of nocturnal dream, in which we dream with one part of ourselves, and yet at the same time we know with another part that we are dreaming. The dream continues, and is a real dream (that is, it is not just a waking reverie). And yet we know that we are dreaming; we are there outside the dream, as well as being there within it. I think we may let ourselves be instructed by such dreams in the nature of true vision.

Poets have sometimes been called 'visionaries' and sometimes 'dreamers'; but they are likely to be poor poets, unless it is *this* kind of dream that we are connoting when we use the word. Poetic imagination is very close to the dreaming of such dreams, and has little to do with reverie. In reverie we lose ourselves (we speak of being 'lost in reverie'), we are absorbed; but in imagination we find ourselves in finding vision. The vision is objective (as if it were part of ordinary consciousness); but its very objectivity is as much our own as what we call subjectivity- for it is the content of extraordinary consciousness, and that is now what we mean by 'objectivity'; it is what

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 32.

we mean (in terms of the spectrum of consciousness) even by rocks and stones and trees. Imagination is a Western concept, and is potentially extraordinary consciousness-not just the dream stage, but the whole gamut of it - *present with* ordinary consciousness.(Barfield 1999, 80)

*Metaphor* is basic to imagination. Through metaphor the characters in *The Waves* appeal to the reader's imagination. They are meant to suggest, not to define. Aristotle claimed that to create good metaphors is a sign of the poetic gift (Aristotle, *Poetics* XXII ). Finding good metaphors implies the similarity view, which involves an implicit comparison between two disparate things, like in the condensed or elliptical simile. The metaphor's literary force, though, may depend on its incongruity. The Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson, developed his theory that *metaphor* and *metonymy* are two fundamental structures of language. Metaphor corresponds to the selection process and depends on similarity between things not normally contiguous. Metaphor links by similarity, and metonymy links by contiguity. Jakobson applies the basic principles of Saussurian linguistics, that language, has a twofold character, involving two distinct operations, selection and combination. Metonymy moves from one thing to another which it is contiguous with, as when we say 'the Crown' for 'the Queen', or 'deep' for 'sea'. It infers the qualities of the whole from those of a part and allows parts to represent wholes.

Jakobson points out that a competition between both devices, metaphoric and metonymic, is manifest in any symbolic process. He develops the idea that the principle of similarity underlies *poetry*.. *Prose*, on the contrary, is forwarded essentially by contiguity. 'Thus, for poetry, metaphor, and for prose, metonymy is the line of least resistance and, consequently, the study of poetical tropes is directed chiefly toward metaphor' (Jakobson 1988, 57-61). I have applied some of these elements in my discussion on *The Interludes* where the poetic prose particularly is rich. In the fourth interlude, for example, horse imagery relate through metonymy:

The waves fell with the concussion of *horses' hooves*, their spray rose like the tossing of *lances* and *assegais* over the *riders' heads*. (my italics)

The horses' hooves are contiguous with lances and assegais and riders' heads. And the horses' hooves are used as a metaphor for 'the waves'. This metaphor links by similarity. The example of this sentence shows how the language relates to prose and poetry, and consequently to *poetic prose*.

Apart from the principles of metaphor and metonymy I use concepts like *simile*, *synecdoche* and *personification* in the discussion of the Interludes. The *simile* is a comparison between two distinctly different things explicitly indicated by the word *like*, or *as*. *Synecdoche*

is formed by a part of something used to signify the whole, or the whole is used to signify the part. In *personification*, an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes of feelings (Abrams 2005, 102-3).

*Symbol* is applied to a word or a phrase which suggests a range of reference, beyond itself. There is often a hidden significance related to a symbol. Jung says that an image is symbolic 'when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning' and has 'an unconscious aspect'. This can never be defined or explained (Jung 1968, 4). The main symbols in *The Waves*, concern the characters' common consciousness and the soul's relationship to the spirit.

## Method

Basically, my critical method is *close reading*, and my intention is to gain a deeper understanding of how the style contributes to the development of themes in the narrative.

The term *close reading* is in critical history associated with New Criticism, an Anglo American school of thought which developed in the 1940s. New Critics regarded a poem primarily as poetry and not anything else. The approach is to analyze the meanings and interactions of words, *figures of speech*, and *symbols* (Abrams 2005, 189).

In my method, I ask questions concerning patterns, like 'how' is this word, phrase, sentence, repetition or image used, and for what purpose? The method asks of the critic to analyse the relationship and multiple meanings of verbal and figurative components within a work. This implies highlighting key words and phrases in order to focus on a particular passage, and then to relate this to the text as a whole.

Cleanth Brooks, who was one of the most influential New Critics, comments on reading an Ode by Keats: ....'if we have followed the development of the metaphors, if we have been alive to the paradoxes which work throughout the poem, perhaps then, we shall be prepared for the enigmatic final paradox which 'the silent form' utters'. He also points out the notion of the reader's responsibility to the text: if we have followed, if we have been alive, then we shall be prepared.

Apart from citing and illustrating text in *The Waves*, I have chosen to cite certain passages from the *Two Holograph Drafts of The Waves*, transcribed and edited by J.W. Graham (1976). These drafts give the reader access to the author's writing process towards the final novel which, in my consideration, contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel. The drafts show the author's process of elimination towards a concentrated form in the final product. The final version has more authority as it presents the work in its most artistic and

‘modern’ form. But the drafts represent the ideas or the seeds that are unfolding within the author’s mind. They add information which is not given in such a concentrated form as *The Waves* represents. Hence they provide a context of interpersonal relations.

Entries from Woolf’s comprehensive *Diary* are cited to illustrate and explain the purpose of the author’s choice of literary devices in *The Waves*. This diary discloses her ideas about *The Waves*, from her first conception of it until the final result and the circumstances around publication. In the diary she communes with herself about the books she is writing or about future books which she intends to write. She discusses the problems of plot, form or character which she encountered in each of her books as she conceived them, or wrote and revised them. The diary also shows the extraordinary energy and persistence with which Woolf devoted herself to the art of writing and the conscientiousness with which she wrote and rewrote her books. I have chosen to include this process of writing from the first draft to the final product when I have found it relevant and critically productive.

Furthermore, for my discussion on ‘the moment in states of consciousness’, I have found Woolf’s autobiographical work, *Moments of Being*, particularly useful, with its vivid impressions from her childhood, and I have integrated some of these scenes in the discussion.<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to relate certain experiences in the author’s life, as she describes them in *A Sketch of the Past* (MOB), to some of the monologues in *The Waves*. Obviously, the purpose of integrating an autobiographical work in one’s critical method, must be to relate the work to the text. Style, arrangement, construction puts us at a distance from ‘the special life’, but a novel like *The Waves*, brings us into close touch with life. I believe that these aspects can be combined. *Moments of Being* has definitely contributed to my understanding of *The Waves*. *The Two Holograph Drafts*, the *Diary* and *Moments of Being* have provided me with the inspiration and information that I needed for my analysis. Together they form *The Waves*’ documented history.

### **Outline of chapters**

The following discussion will explore narrative, poetic and dramatic techniques, which build *The Waves*, shape the text and contribute to the novel’s characteristic style. The main emphasis will be on poetry as it is expressed through rhythm, imagery and symbols. These aspects will be discussed from various points of view. There will be some blurred transitions

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<sup>7</sup> See p.28.

between different aspects, as poetic images are repeated in different contexts and presented from different points of view in the text.

The next chapter will discuss various *narrative techniques*. I will follow the creative process of the novel from the author's first ideas about scenery and imagery as they are presented in the author's diary. I will further argue how narrators are presented and will explore the relationship between 'the lonely mind', the 'lady writing' and Bernard. The difference between *soliloquy and interior monologue* will be viewed as variants on stream of consciousness techniques. 'The moment in states of consciousness' will be related to experiences of the author's own life, as they are illustrated in *Moments of Being*. *Rhythm and musical elements* represent the dynamic force of the language. Finally, I will point to the connection between musical and rhythmical structures in the text and discuss devices like *leitmotif, rhythm, repetition and variation*.

In chapter three I will explore the *images and symbols* which are related to each individual character and the characters as one organism. In 'Character as metaphor' I will discuss the author's portrayal of character and the motifs which are influenced by the metaphors. The six characters are complementary to each other, and together they form a whole. Turning to 'Shared imagery and symbols', I will shed some light on the way in which imagery discloses the threading of the characters' minds, regarding their understanding of each other and of life as a whole. My aim will be to lift the symbols to some higher level of understanding. In this sense, the 'shared imagery and symbols' present a transformation of 'character as metaphor'.

Chapter four will be devoted to 'The Interludes', and 'The silent world'. The Interludes create the frame of the novel, and they are related to the episodes in the sense that the atmosphere foreshadows the psychological development of the characters. Thus the novel will be explored from within, through the characters' minds, and from without, through the poetic moods which colour the six interwoven lives. I will discuss the unique *poetic language* represented through metaphor and metonymy as well as sounds of words and images.

In 'The silent world' the more mystical aspect of *The Waves* will be discussed in the light of 'that reality which exists beyond human life', and consequently, human speech.

Chapter five will aim to bring together the various considerations from the previous chapters, which hopefully will result in an improved understanding of *The Waves* and its narrative, dramatic and poetic style.

The appendix includes five handwritten manuscript pages of the *Two Holograph Drafts*.



## Chapter 2: Narrative techniques

This chapter will discuss various literary devices used in *The Waves* and consider the effects which contribute to give *The Waves* its characteristic style. I then proceed to discuss the author's device of putting 'the lonely mind' in the novel and her idea of the 'lady writing' as well as the role of her main 'narrator' Bernard. I will focus on the style of monologue as a stream of consciousness technique. I will then explore two different aspects of the *monologue*; first, the *moment* and second, *soliloquy / interior monologue*. My intention is to differentiate between the literary effect that soliloquy and interior monologue have on the novel. Finally I will illustrate the rhythmical aspect of the poetic prose as well as its musical nature.

### The Waves: novel-poem and play-poem

21 February 1927 Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary (Diary III, 128):

Why not invent a new kind of play- as for instance

Woman thinks...

He does.

Organ Plays.

She writes.

They say:

She sings:

Night speaks:

They miss

I think it must be something in this line- though I cannot now see what. Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel & a play.

This sketch tells us something about the style she is going to approach in *The Waves*. The sentences are short, they have no object, only subjects: woman, he, organ, she, they, night, they. We know from the sketch that somebody will be thinking, speaking and singing, and there will be some action. There will be longing. 'She writes' may be related to 'the woman writing' in the story, who might be synonymous with 'woman thinks'. Will it become a story? Virginia Woolf has conceived the idea of her new book which she at this stage is intending to call '*The Moths*'. She had wanted to invent a new form of fiction in *Jacob's Room* (1929), which had a certain 'looseness and lightness' of style. She writes in her diary 26 January 1920 that she has a desire to 'enclose everything, everything'. Now, she seeks a new method in order to exclude and eliminate all that which she considered unnecessary to the poetic text, to 'concentrate and intensify'. In this entry, written in May 1929, she already states the problem of 'story'. The author intends to build up *scenes* rather than a *story* with a beginning and an end:

Every morning I write a little sketch to amuse myself. I am not saying, I might say, that these

sketches have any relevance. *I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might be done in that way. A mind thinking.* They might be islands of light - islands in the stream that I am trying to convey: life itself going on. The current of the moths flying strongly this way. A lamp & a flower pot in the centre. The flower can always be changing. But there must be more unity between each scene than I can find at present. Autobiography it might be called.  
(Diary III, 28 May 1929, 228, my italics)

She thinks that she is not trying to tell a story, yet 'it might be done in that way'. How is this story going to be written, and by whom? I will come back to this question of *narrator* later in this chapter. Woolf also intends to write an account of her life. In 'The moment in states of consciousness' I will refer to certain incidents in the author's life which seem to be related to central themes in the novel.

When Virginia Woolf was planning the first episode named *childhood*, she was concerned that it was not supposed to be *her* childhood: 'This shall be Childhood, but it must not be *my* childhood ( Diary III, 23 June 1929, 236). In *The Two Holograph Drafts* the 'world from the beginning' is seen through the children's eyes. They wake up as from a dream-like state and discover the world around them:

That the beginning should go like this.  
A description of dawn-& and the sea-breaking on a beach.  
Then each child wakes and sees something.  
a globe: an object: Says something.  
a face. A spoon.  
The sea again  
The garden  
Louis hides it hears a wave breaking  
a stairs. a pot of marmalade. (Draft II, 400)

Then, in the final version of *The Waves*, the six voices are presented, one by one, in short utterances:

'I see a ring', said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light'.  
'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe'.  
'I hear a sound', said Rhoda, cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down'.

The diary excerpt mentioned above informs us that the author also had a play in mind when she planned *The Waves*, making notes of the stage directions: 'A lamp & a flower pot in the centre'. The author wants scenes rather than 'a story'.

A diary entry from 18 June 1927 depicts images of 'moths', 'ship' and 'night':

Now the moths I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed in here: the play-poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night & c, all flowing together: intersected by the arrival of the bright moths. A man & a woman are to be sitting at a table talking. Or shall they remain silent? It is to be a love story: she is finally to let the last great moth in. The contrasts might be something of this sort: she might talk, or think, about the age of the earth, the death of humanity; then the moths keep on coming. France: near the sea; at night; a garden under the window. But it needs ripening. I do a little work on it in the evening when the

gramophone is playing the Beethoven sonatas. (Diary III, 139)

The image of the moths was changed. In September 1929, the author suddenly remembered that moths do not fly by day. She decided to change the title to *The Waves*.

Furthermore, she writes:

.... I shall have two different currents-the moths flying along; the flower upright in the centre; a perpetual crumbling and renewing of the plant. In its leaves she might see things happen. But who is *she*? I am very anxious that she should have no name. I don't want a Lavinia or Penelope: I want 'she'. But that becomes arty, liberty, greenery, yallery somehow: symbolic in loose robes. Of course I can make her think backwards and forwards; I can tell stories. But that's not it. Also I shall do away with exact place and time... (Diary III,28 May 1929,229-30, my italics)

In this diary entry the author refers and comments on the woman who thinks, speaks and sings referred to in the first entry (21 February 1927).The idea of a lady has ripened, and we shall see how it develops later in this chapter.

J.W. Graham applies the term 'omnipercipience' to the narrative and defines it as 'a perception of the characters' inner experience fused with a perception of what they do not perceive, the background of time and the sea against which they are set (Graham 1970, 204). Inspired by Graham, I consider the monologues in *The Waves* as *islands of light* depicted through the lonely voices of each speaker, and the interludes as *movements of light* depicted through the sun's position in the sky. The form of the soliloquies fused with the form of the interludes accomodates the elements of inner experience and atmosphere of nature.

The narrative is built up of 9 *episodes*, preceded by 8 *interludes* and followed by the ninth, which are carefully set apart from the episodes. Each episode deals with its own theme, although they are interwoven throughout the narrative:

Interlude 1  
Episode 1 Childhood  
Interlude 2  
Episode 2 School  
Interlude 3  
Episode 3 College  
Interlude 4  
Episode 4 Farewell dinner  
Interlude 5  
Episode 5 Death  
Interlude 6  
Episode 6 Life  
Interlude 7  
Episode 7 Middle age  
Interlude 8  
Episode 8 Reunion dinner  
Episode 9 Summing up  
Interlude 9  
(*The Two Holograph Drafts*, 49)

The interludes provide the narrative with an orderly frame for the lives of the six characters. At the same time, the characters are not aware of the ‘speaker’ of the interludes. They present us with symbols which run through the interludes and foreshadow the physical and psychological state of the characters.

The episodes in the narrative are communicated in the first person by means of the interior monologue, in which the six characters ‘speak’ of themselves. The technique of using ‘six streams of consciousness’, opens up for different perspectives. The interludes are written as a third-person narrative, by an omniscient third person, authorial narrator. The purpose of using the third-person narration in the interlude, is to create a background of impersonal style, where there is no narrator interfering in the plot.

### **The lonely mind and Bernard the narrator**

Working on problems related to narrative technique, Virginia Woolf asked herself:

‘Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker? One wants some device which is not a trick’  
(Diary III, 25 September 1924, 259).

I think this question is central to *The Waves*, not only regarding the question of a mysterious, distant character that is to be found throughout the book, but also regarding the narrator’s voice. The problem is related to the notions of ‘author’ and ‘narrator’. In *The Waves* we are faced with a mysterious lady, without a name, who sits by the window writing. At the same time we are faced with the author’s concept of ‘the mind thinking’. How are the lady and the mind represented in *The Waves*, and what is the role of Bernard the ‘narrator’?

The author writes in her diary 4 September 1929:

I have thought about this device: to put  
The Lonely Mind  
separately in *The Moths*, as it were a person.  
(Diary III, 251)

In the diary entry dated 28 May 1929, the reader is confronted with the question: who is *she*, this mysterious lady without a name. Is the ‘lady writing’ synonymous with ‘a mind thinking’, in the narrative? From the diary entry mentioned above, it might be.

The *first interlude* alludes to a woman who is ‘couched beneath the horizon’ and illumines the whole sky, and in my view, *The Waves* as a whole:

As if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp...Then she raised her arm higher ..Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame

became visible...and all around it the sea blazed gold and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. (Interlude 1)

The spiritual nature of this woman is here more prevalent than in the presentation of the lady in the following *episode*:

‘The lady sits between the two long windows, writing.’ This lady is often mentioned together with ‘the gardeners sweeping’: ‘I see the lady writing. I see the gardeners sweeping,’ said Susan. ‘If we died here, nobody would bury us’. (TW, 11)

And the lady sits at a *table* writing: ‘At Elvedon the gardeners swept and swept, and the woman sat at a table writing’, said Bernard. (TW, 93) The author adds a *window* to the setting, which gives a non-realistic impression; ‘a garden under a window’ (Diary III, 18 June 1927, 139).

It is quite clear that the ‘lady writing’ refers to the author, but the lady is a ‘representation of the author’ who is writing *The Waves* with her ‘wet’ brush, eliminating all waste in her attempt to achieve a concentrated poetic form. The lonely mind, brooding in thought, is referred to in the *first draft*:

Here the mind, old or young, man or woman-it matters not-brooding among the things on the table top observed the pale shadow that among the glass, plate & books was becoming invisible. Under the tent of thought it sat brooding. It was bent. It was pondering. It was conscious of some curious drift which made it turn, first here, then there. It was itself possessed of an extraordinary omnipotence. (Draft 1, 39)

The mind is here represented neither as man nor woman, but is referred to as ‘it’. In the same draft where she presents her view that she is not concerned with the single life but with lives together and that she tries to find in the past fragments of time, Woolf identifies the *lonely mind*:

There was nobody to hear these words; they were spoken, perhaps not even aloud, by somebody, whose sex could not be distinguished, in this early light. (Draft 1, 42)

As presented in the first draft, the mind, or the thinker, is at work on a higher level than the characters in *The Waves*. The thinking mind alludes to the omnipotent force, the creative energy to which the author aspires. This nameless narrator is free to think backwards and forwards. ‘It’ resembles an omniscient author, and this narrator is intended to act as a *persona*, ‘symbolic in loose robes’. In one sense, the author is identifying herself with ‘the lady writing’; a mind outside ‘the story’. But it is important to distinguish the author from this ‘mind’, as the lady writing is a part of the narrative. She is a distant character, but

nevertheless an image, 'a lady who sits writing.' Her voice is only occasionally heard, as when the author comments on narrative elements in the novel.

The lady appears more distinctly before the reader towards the end of the book:

'Down below, through the depths of the leaves, the gardeners swept the lawns with great brooms. The lady sat writing. Transfixed, stopped dead, I thought, "I cannot interfere with a single stroke of those brooms. They sweep and they sweep. Nor with the fixity of that woman writing". (TW, 185)

Here the image of the lady writing is made distinct by its *fixity*. The effect is similar to that of a character who freezes in a play and thereby 'sticks in the mind' as image. In the diary Woolf describes how it feels to be writing *The Waves*: 'It is like sweeping an entire canvas with a wet brush' (AWD, 13 May 1931, 171). This citation indicates the author's identification with the lady writing. From these examples we see that the woman thinking, writing and singing, the mind thinking, the lonely mind and the woman couched beneath the horizon, are intimately related and yet distinguished images.

Hillis Miller's description of Woolf's narrator in *To the Lighthouse* may well be applied to *the lady writing* and the *mind thinking* in *The Waves*: 'She, he, it is anonymous, impersonal, ubiquitous, subtle, penetrative, insidious, sympathetic, and, indifferent at once, able to plunge into the depths of any character's thoughts and feelings but liable to move without warning out of one mind and into another in the middle of a sentence' (Miller 1990, 156). At the same time, Miller's notion of Woolf's narrator embraces the narrator's voice of Bernard, who possesses the power to move in and out of all the other characters' minds in the novel.

In March 1929, the author writes in her diary about the relationship between 'the lady writing' and Bernard, 'the storyteller'. She describes how she sees the beginning of *The Moths*, with the children in their lesson, sitting at a long table. There is a central person at the table, whose role the author describes:

Then the person who is at the table can call out anyone of them at any moment; and build up by that person, the mood, tell a story, for instance about dogs or nurses; or some adventure of a child's kind; all to be very Arabian Nights; and so on.. Then another person of figure must be selected. The unreal world must be round all this-the phantom waves. The Moth must come in; the beautiful single moth. Could one not get the waves to be heard all through? ...She might have a book to read in- another to write in-old letters.(AWD, 23 June 1929, 144)

Already at this stage there is a connection between Bernard and the lady. But Bernard is not yet distinguished as a character. Yet it is he who calls the others out at any moment in *The Waves*.

The six characters act as narrators of whom Bernard is the main one. They communicate to the reader their experiences of ‘what life feels like’ during its different stages. They present stories about each other, which then, at the end, are summed up by Bernard. He is being used as an interesting narrative instrument to mediate the author’s own perception of life. Bernard often has the role of describing the ‘nature of life’ through metaphors, as when life has ‘its concord and its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath’, or that life is ‘a solid substance shaped like a globe which we turn about in our fingers’ (TW, 193). He is also the character who has the function of describing the ‘nature’ of all the other characters. He is the one through whom all the others are ‘seen’: He sees Louis as stone-carved, sculpturesque, Neville as scissor-cutting, Susan with her crystal eyes, the dancing Jinny and the nymph-like Rhoda, whose fountain is always wet (TW, 87). Or when he indicates the interests of his friends: ‘With Neville, “let’s discuss Hamlet”, With Louis, science. With Jinny, love’ (TW, 197). In Neville’s words ‘We are all phrases in Bernard’s story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B’.

Bernard acts as ‘storyteller’, yet he pretends not to be one:

But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story - and there are so many, and so many –stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like children *we tell each other* stories, and to decorate them we make up these ridiculous, flamboyant, beautiful phrases. How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground. (TW, 183, my italics)

In the last episode he will tell the reader the ‘story’ of the lives of his friends, as well as of his own: ‘In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening to a garden, and beyond that the sea’ (TW, 184). He tells the reader the stories of childhood, school, love, marriage, death, but ‘none of them are true’. The narrator Bernard represents in a sense many views, as he does not know how to distinguish his life from the lives of his friends: ‘I am many people’ (TW, 212). But concluding the story, sitting by the table with his ‘for ever bare things’; his coffee-cup, knife, fork, ‘things in themselves’, he sees himself as ‘myself being myself’ (TW, 227).

Apart from presenting the author’s own perceptions of life, Bernard also mediates the author’s intentions and indications regarding the literary style of *The Waves*. Disguised as Bernard, the author speaks of language and the form of the novel:

The process of *writing to a rhythm* is described:

Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain (the rhythm is the main thing in writing). Now without pausing I will begin, on the very lilt of the stroke – (TW, 58)

*Events* are described as cyclic as time 'falling'. The author raises the questions of the true nature of a *story* and how it should *end*:

As a drop falls from a glass heavy with some sediment, *time falls*. These are the true cycles, these are the *true events*. (TW, 141, my italics)

But let me consider. The drop falls; another stage has been reached. Stage upon stage. *And why should there be an end of stages? And where do they lead? To what conclusion?* I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, *Are there stories?* (TW, 143, my italics)

Should this be the end of the story? A kind of sigh? A last ripple of the wave? A trickle of water to some gutter where, burbling, it dies away? Let me touch the table – so – and thus recover my sense of the moment...But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning. (TW, 205)

In the same episode, the author creates an intimate relationship between Bernard the narrator and herself the author, as 'the thinking mind outside the story', by integrating the 'lady writing' in Bernard's stories at regular intervals:

Down below, through the depths of the leaves, the gardeners swept the lawns with great brooms. The lady sat writing. Transfixed, stopped dead, I thought, "I cannot interfere with a single stroke of those brooms. They sweep and they sweep. Nor with the fixity of that lady writing." (TW, 185)

And by some flick of a scent or a sound on a nerve, the old image- the gardeners sweeping, the lady writing returned. I saw the figures beneath the beech trees at Elvedon; the gardeners swept, the lady at the table sat writing.' (TW, 206)

Bernard is the instrument demonstrating most of the author's literary devices. He places himself at the 'table', takes his napkin, unfolds it and tells the story of his life. The unfolding of the napkin represents the 'folds of the past' (Draft I, 12). When he tells about events of his friends, he takes his 'spoon' and dips into the 'pool': 'But let me dip again and bring up in my spoon another of these minute objects which we call optimistically, 'characters of our friends' (TW, 187). 'I strike the table with a spoon', he says (TW, 213). 'There is nothing one can fish up in a spoon; nothing one can call an event' (TW, 197). Events are not only drops falling, they are 'fished up in a spoon'. This image of depth may be related to the unconscious aspect of the mind, whereas the drop falling may be seen as a more spiritual aspect, since they 'fall on the roof of the mind'. There are not many outer events in this narrative, as the plots are of a different nature. After Bernard has presented his impressions of his friends, he returns them to the pool: 'I return him to the pool where he will acquire lustre' (TW, 188). Then the next impression follows. He calls out an image, inviting the reader to explore: 'Now, let us



explore...'(TW, 10). Bernard tries to become a novelist, but he is never able to put the events into sequence. But he comes to realize the central truth of the novel, that life is a ceaseless flux, a series of waves, which cannot be fixed (Payne 1982, 216).

### **The moment in states of consciousness**

In a diary entry 28 November 1928, Virginia Woolf wrote:

The idea has come to me that I want to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the *moment* whole: whatever it includes. Say that *the moment* is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. (AWD, 139, my italics)

'The moment' was to contain the essence of the thoughts and feelings she wanted to communicate, enveloped by the voice of the sea. One of the most important characteristics of stream of consciousness writing is the fact that everything that enters consciousness is there at the 'present moment'. The event of the moment, no matter how much clock time it occupies, may be infinitely extended or highly compressed.

The author reflects on the changing nature of the moment and describes its transitory nature:

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on 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 on the waves. (Diary III, 4 January, 1929,218, my italics)

In *The Waves* characters are drawn from descriptions of moments in their lives. Fragments of time are depicted as states of consciousness, and the nature of each moment is of a very different kind to each character. I have chosen to relate the moments to the author's own life. In *A Sketch of the Past* the author has described certain moments in her life which, in my view, are relevant to our understanding of the characters. The author described her memories of moments from her childhood as colour and sound memories which to her could be more real than the present moment:

At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen...I see it - the past - as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery...I shall listen to the past...I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start...(MOB, 67).

She goes on to draw the line between past and present:

‘The past comes back to me when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else...’ (MOB, 98)

Some of the moments in *The Waves* are clearly built in the author’s memory from her childhood. Yet the scenes she describes are different than her real experiences. They still seem to contain elements of her lived moments. These moments are of a transient nature.

Let us look at some moments which present to the reader the rhythms of consciousness as they occur in the characters’ minds. These moments will be illustrated by scenes from the author’s childhood described in *A Sketch of the Past*. The first moment I have chosen is the ‘apple-tree scene’ in *The Waves*, experienced by Neville:

Since I am supposed, said Neville, ‘to be too delicate to go with them, since I get so easily tired and then I am sick, I will use this hour of solitude, this reprieve from conversation...by standing on the same stair half-way up the landing, what I felt when I heard about the dead man through the swing-door last night...He was found with his throat cut. The apple-tree leaves became fixed in the sky; the moon glared; I was unable to lift my foot on the stair. He was found in the gutter. His blood gurgled down the gutter. His jowl was white as a dead codfish. I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, “death among the apple trees” for ever...I was unable to pass by. There was an obstacle. ..But we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass. (TW, 17)

This experience is echoed as an experienced moment from the author’s childhood:

The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seems to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy’s suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green crease of the bark-it was a moonlit night-in a trance of horror’. (MOB, 71)

The author describes how this moment ended in a *state of despair*, she felt dragged down into some pit of absolute despair, and her body seemed paralysed. It was a ‘trance of horror’. Furthermore, she describes this moment as exceptional. ‘Unfortunately, one only remembers what is exceptional’, she says, ‘and there seems to be no reason why one thing is exceptional and another not’ (MOB, 70, 71). These moments of ‘being’, as Woolf describes them, were embedded in moments of ‘non-being’, things that we do not remember. Most days include more non-being than being, she says. I tend to agree.

There is one important moment in *Louis’* life where the experience of time seems to have an affect on his whole life. As a child he stands on the path in the garden, and suddenly

something happens to him. This event is described more fully in the *first draft* than in *The Waves*:

It was a garden, & the corner of a garden; and there Louis, the Australian boy, stood, while the other children hooted & catcalled & skimmed the flower beds. He stood there, pressing the hollow tube of a stalk, so that the sticky drops oozed. He stood there, in the middle of the path, & thought; fantastically, how he was rooted there, but with roots that went down to the middle of the earth; and his went down through the ages so that he had seen the pyramids building; had always been; was not 'I', was not able to move from one spot to another; had no connection with the hand that held the stalk...he stood there, dumb, firmly pressing the stalk obliterated like some worn stone, whose nose had been eaten by the innumerable tides- when suddenly Jinny dashed in, & kissed him' .(Draft I, 73).

In *The Waves* the feeling of rootedness and self observation is contained in a more condensed form:

I feel come over me the sense of the earth under me, and my roots going down and down, till they wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre.(TW, 24)

Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. (TW, 7)

*Louis'* experience of himself 'down there' as a stone figure, captures the glimpse he had of himself in a different time and in a different place. His feeling of being rooted as he is standing on the path, pressing a hollow tube of a stalk, is a sensual experience. His deep roots 'wrap themselves round some hardness at the centre' of the earth (TW, p. 24). This moment he 'stands on' is a journey in time. His consciousness 'moves' in time, expanding the moment by being led far back in time, to a time even before he was born.

The nature of this transitory moment can be traced in the author's life. It is, however, important to be aware that *Louis'* experience is not the same experience as that referred to in *A Sketch of the Past*. Yet I will consider it, as it refers to a similar time perspective:

There was a slab outside in the dining-room. Once I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there, his hand began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of this hand going under my clothes, going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop, how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts....I remember resenting, disliking it-what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body must not be touched; must be instinctive. It proves the Virginia Stephen was not born on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1882, *but was born many thousands years ago*. And had from the very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past. (MOB, 69, my italics)

What is significant regarding this experienced moment is the feeling of being rooted in a centre at the same time as the mind expands in time by stretching far back into past history.

The author creates a contrast between the contracted bodily experience and the expansive mind experience.

*Jinny's* sense of time stands in contrast to Louis'. In her experience of the moment's intensity there is 'no past, no future; merely the moment in its ring of light, and our bodies; and the inevitable climax, the ecstasy' (TW, 194). Her sensuous bright moment in the novel embodies the present only, experienced through her body:

I feel a thousand capacities spring up in me. I am arch, gay, languid, melancholy by turns. I am rooted but I flow. All gold, flowing that way, I say to this one, "Come"...He approaches. He makes towards me. This is the most exciting moment I have ever known. I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted so that he may come to me. "Come", I say, "come". (TW, 76)

She seeks the moment, and the ecstasy is over: 'There! That is my moment of ecstasy. Now it is over'. The nature of this moment is extremely condensed. She almost loses consciousness, being attuned to her bodily experience. She longs to be carried off somewhere but does not know where to. This transient moment is of a sexual nature. Jinny identifies herself with her body only, and her 'moment of being' is therefore physical. This moment of being is embedded in a moment of non-being - the lack of mind consciousness.

*Rhoda's* experience of crossing the puddle marks a crucial moment in her life. The moment when she is unable to cross the puddle, she has a feeling of being suspended and the whole world seems unreal. Her consciousness is detached from the physical world. This agonising experience of hardly being able to cross a puddle, and then to be drawn back to life and to the earth, is captured in the moment:

Then very gingerly I put my foot across. I laid my hand against the brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into the body over the grey cadaverous space of the puddle. This is life to which I am committed. (TW,47)

This moment enhances the 'between-life-and -death consciousness.' And the cadaverous space of the puddle is used as a metaphor of death. The experience is inspired by the author's description of her own life:

There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something...the whole world became unreal. (MOB, 78)

Rhoda experiences life as disconnected moments of shocks which tear her apart:

I am afraid of the shock of sensation that leaps upon me, because I cannot deal with it as you do- I cannot make one moment merge into the next. To me they are all violent, all separate; and if I fall under the shock of the leap of the moment you will be on me, tearing me to pieces. (TW, 97)

These moments are transitory in different ways. Neville's moment is a confrontation with death which ends in a trance of horror. Louis' journey in time brings him back to a pre-birth experience in the past. In Jinny's life there is no distinction between past and present. In Rhoda's moment the mind is suspended, and the connection between past and present is broken by sudden shocks. In the characters of Louis, Jinny and Rhoda the mind and body are disintegrated. This discrepancy between mind and body is of a different kind to each person described.

### **The monologue in streams of consciousness**

In the introductory part of this thesis, I claimed that the purpose of the stream of consciousness novel which employs soliloquy is sometimes achieved by the combination of soliloquy with interior monologue. In *The Waves* the main emphasis is, in my view, on *soliloquy*. These soliloquies are spoken by characters talking to themselves with an assumed audience. The atmosphere of loneliness is supported by the form of the soliloquies, and I shall illustrate the style of *soliloquy* and *interior monologue* by using three different examples of monologues. The first one follows on from the example to which we referred in the chapter on Theory: 'Stream of consciousness'. In this monologue the child speaks to himself:

*Now they have all gone', said Louis. 'I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early before lessons. Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters. I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world...I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear trappings, tremblings, stirrings round me.(TW, 7, 8, my italics)*

The monologue is here a useful device as to describe a person's feeling of loneliness, which is communicated directly by the character to the reader. The character speaks to himself with an assumed audience: 'I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers.' Louis' feeling of loneliness is here the plot. It is the drama of a sensitive child's soul who is conscious of his loneliness and who lives in his own secret world. According to Humphrey, *soliloquy* represents a successful combination of interior consciousness with exterior action. We see this combination in Louis' speech, where

he tells the audience that the others have left him. His unconscious rises to the surface as he is able to 'see' himself at distance; he sees himself up here and down there. These states of consciousness are substantiated by symbols like stalk, fibre, leaf, snake, stone figure. A boy would normally not express himself in symbols, but the technique of focussing on symbols and images in a monologue is implied in the style of *interior monologue*.

There is no disorder in his speech. By speaking in solitude, he manages to give us all the signposts about himself, without the intervention of the voice of an author. He informs us about the setting and his age. He also tells us about his personal appearance, but only through the symbol of a brass belt with a snake, and as a stone figure in a different time and setting. This coherence is one of the characteristics which belong to *soliloquy*. Humphrey suggests that the method for achieving this coherence could not have been achieved by interior monologue, for greater coherence and unity were needed than the technique provides (Humphrey 1972, 38).

Then follows a section seemingly full of *sense impressions*, but the reader discovers that these impressions are symbolic for the character's depth of consciousness. According to Humphrey, since the depth of consciousness that the soliloquy can depict is limited, *interior monologue* is a more useful device for depicting this depth. He also suggests three factors which control the interior monologue; memory, sense impressions and imagination. The combination of these factors gives interior monologue its characteristic elasticity:

'Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green'. 'The petals are harlequins.'

There is light and colour:

'The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters.'

One finds suggestions of fear and sexuality:

'Stalks rise from the black hollows'.

In this part of the speech, we find sense impressions which are depicted in an imaginary way, and the text therefore enhances central aspects of the interior monologue. The text suggests the relationship of an individual to 'the depths of the world', depicted through metaphors.

From this example, we have seen that the author has combined the techniques of soliloquy and interior monologue. However, the main emphasis is, in my view, on soliloquy. The speech is well prepared. It has formal style which is enriched by colourful metaphors. I will now present two examples of monologues from the *Two Holograph Drafts*, with the intention of distinguishing the literary effect of one from the other.

I do not know myself. I do not separate myself. I am white in the dawn; & then blaze with all the August stars at night. I am January, May, September – whatever the season is – except for seconds: here now at this gate; where I stand calling for Bridget, who noses after a hare. Now I am terrible, eager; awake; a huntress; a woman grown; with my desire fixed on a man. I want to give; to give, to give. What have I to give? Not sighs & laughter, not elegant & turned phrases like Bernard, & lovely words; not Rhoda's strange communication; not Jinny's dancing & pirouetting. I have only my entire self; undivided, fell, entire; as it was that day in the beech wood with Bernard, as it has always been. To whom can I give? And I would then possess everything absolutely. I would possess children. I would possess some small house; with turnips; roses; pigeons; cows & a room hung with hams. I would see potatoes heaved up out of the earth. It is my self. My self is in my eyes. They are pear-shaped. Blue grey. They see insects in the grass. They see down to the roots where they fall, a pear shape is cut out. I am not a person, but a light, falling hard-edged upon this gate, this ground.

*Susan* (Draft II, p.502-3)

I am warm. I am at rest. I see the river- I see the tree. Boats float past. Far away a bell tolls – but not for death – only to mark another hour of this incredibly happy existence. A leaf seems to fall from joy. To be young and to be in love -& to realise that one is young, & is in love, as one realizes that the tree there – as one sees its fine branches shoot, red & gold, in a fine fountain white behind, obscured by red leaves, & reflected in the water, go boatloads of happy boys – beautiful & long & strong & careless & happy with gramophones & cushions & paper bags ... & then, through the fountains of the willow, to see the grave, yet eternally joyous buildings; which seem porous, not gravid, light though set so immortally in the earth; and to be admitted as part of it – I am responsive to all this... I never confuse my own sensations. I seldom drowse. I feel with sudden pangs. Now – there he is, indolent, powerful, incurious. And my world rocks round me. I sit up. I look at him. He is simply content to be himself.

*Neville*(Draft II, 486)

As they are presented in the second draft, these two excerpts serve to substantiate the characteristic style of monologue in *The Waves*. In Neville's speech we find that the elements of sense impressions which 'stream on' in the character's mind are very different from Susan's 'outspoken monologue.' Her monologue reflects her conscious effort to express her thoughts, and the reader gets the impression that she speaks to an audience. She has planned what to say, and she does not allow her mind to linger with impressions and feelings as Neville does. The first monologue may be distinguished from the second, with its reference to an assumed audience. This 'planned' speech gives the language a concentrated form.

*Susan* communicates her identity in a conscious and direct way to the reader/listener. Adjectives like 'eager', 'awake', 'a huntress', 'a woman grown' emphasize this identity. She also allows herself to pause while reflecting on what she is able to give as she allows her mind to wander, thinking of Bernard's lovely phrases or the way Rhoda behaves. But she soon gathers herself and tells us what she 'knows', that she wants to possess children. In common with Louis, she observes herself from a distance, speaking about her eyes: 'They see down to the roots where they fall'. Susan expresses directly to an audience how she experiences the

world and herself in a very self-conscious way. She comes out into the light, and through the style of the soliloquy she is able to move out of her imprisoned soul.

*Neville* allows his thoughts to wander much more, supported by *sense impressions*. In this way his monologue is more closely related to interior monologue. His sentences are not as formal as with Susan. The images are communicated in elliptic sentences which stream on continuously without breaks:

to be in love and to realize that one is young...that the tree there...as one sees its fine branches shoot, red & gold...red leaves & reflected in the water...beautiful & long & strong & careless & happy with gramophones & cushions & paper bags ...through the fountains of the willow...the grave...(ibid)

This monologue is not formed but rather flowing, hence the contrast between the 'flow' and the 'form' of speech are represented in the two styles. This interior monologue is not ready to become a soliloquy, but by using this stream of consciousness technique the author is able to enter the world of senses and images. The technique may therefore be seen as a process towards a more concentrated form which is achieved in the final version of *The Waves*.

### **Rhythm and musical elements**

I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot...though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader. (Letters, IV, 1978, 204)<sup>8</sup>

Now, this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to get it; and in writing (such is my belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words), and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it'.<sup>9</sup>

In these excerpts from Virginia Woolf's *Letters*, the author stresses the importance of writing *The Waves* to a rhythm. The theme of 'life itself going on' is carried by rhythm throughout the work (Diary III, 28 May 1929, 229). She also claims that in analysing our sensations, we find that we are worked upon as if by music. 'The rise and fall of the sentence soothes us to a mood and removes us to a distance in which the near fades and detail is extinguished,' she says. Rhythm is, in my view, one of the most important devices in *The Waves*. To Virginia Woolf, it was much more important than plot. I have therefore emphasized this by presenting many examples from the text which illustrate the rhythmical element.

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<sup>8</sup> Letter to Ethel Smyth, 18 August 1930 in *A Reflection of The Other Person*.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Vita Sackville West, quoted in Jack F. Stewart: 'Existence and Symbol in *The Waves*'. In *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol 18, No 3, Autumn 1972, 436



In *A Room of One's Own* she tells us that 'a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes'. The rhythm contributes to building up that 'something' which is 'not the story itself' and which gives the novel strength (GR, 143). During her last stage of writing *The Waves*, Woolf attempted to create unity by letting the scenes run together more by rhythm, to avoid cuts; so as to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end' (Diary III, 30 December 1930, 343).

In '*Letter to a Young Poet*', the author advises the poet to get up and come to the window beside her:

All you need to do is to stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, boldly and freely, until one thing melts in another, until the taxis are dancing with the daffodils, until a whole has been made from all these separate fragments... Then let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among the street-until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole. That perhaps is your task-to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way... *to re-think human life into poetry* and so give us tragedy again and comedy by means of characters not spun out at length in the novelist's way, but condensed and synthesized in the poet's way.<sup>10</sup>  
(my italics)

This passage says a lot about Virginia Woolf's own aims as a novelist. The poet has to be open to let rhythm flow freely. The notion of a single rhythm stringing together all the fragments on the street, making them *melt in another* and become a harmonious whole, says something about the motive behind her style.

When read as poetry, the text flows with a certain ease. The text allows the line to be spoken on one breath, and the dreamy atmosphere flows easily as on a slow, harmonious *wave*:

How strange that people should sleep  
That people should put out the lights and go upstairs  
They have taken off their dresses,  
they have put on white nightgowns  
There are no lights in any of these houses  
There is a line of chimney-pots against the sky  
And a street-lamp or two burning,  
as lamps burn when nobody needs them...  
I feel myself shining in the dark  
Silk is on my knee...

(Jinny, 75, adapted by me)

Let us stray for a moment, before we go.  
Let us pace the terrace by the river almost alone  
It is nearly bed-time. People have gone home.  
Now how comforting it is to watch the lights  
coming and going out in the bedrooms of small shopkeepers  
on the other side of the river.  
There is one-there is another.  
What do you think their takings have been today?

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<sup>10</sup> 'Letter to a Young Poet' in *Collected Essays*, vol II, 1966-7, 185

Only just enough to pay for the rent  
for light and food and the children's clothing.  
But just enough...

(Bernard, 179, adapted by me)

According to Jack Stewart, there are four kinds of rhythms in *The Waves*, the rhythm of *words that fall and rise, and fall and rise again*, the rhythm of a physical being as an *expanding mechanism, opening and shutting, shutting and opening*, the rhythm of *succeeding generations*, and the rhythm of *the mere process of life*. I will illustrate this comment with a few short examples. Then I will develop the theme of rhythm and musical elements on a more detailed level.

Neville echoes Bernard's poetic inspiration: 'Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have laid dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and *fall and rise*, and fall and rise again (TW, 61). Both Jinny, Rhoda, and Susan speak about the rhythm of '*opening and shutting*'. Jinny is able to open and shut her body at will: 'I open my body. I shut my body at will.' Rhoda is afraid of the door opening when the tiger leaps, and with Susan this rhythm is beating at a slower pace: 'So life pours in my limbs. So I am driven forward, till I could cry, as I move from dawn to dusk opening and shutting'. In the same passage we are reminded of *succeeding generations*: 'Yet more will come, more children; more cradles, more baskets in the kitchen and hams ripening; and onions glistening; and more lettuce and potatoes (TW, 131-2). The *mere process of life* is described: 'Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday; Tuesday. Each spreads the same ripple' (TW, 217). The rhythm goes on, being repeated: 'Each day spreads the same ripple of well-being, repeats the same curve of rhythm'.

When we listen to one speaker taking over from the other, we are presented with images rising from the depth of each character.

'I see a ring', said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.'

'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.'

'I hear a sound,' said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down' (TW, 5).

In this rhythmic speech flow following on from one speaker to the next, we see that the motif of *the word* moves through all speeches, but they all have their own rhythm and their own point of view as all characters live in their different worlds. The characters represent different aspects of the *word*:

Those are white words,' said Susan, 'like stones one picks up from the seashore.'

They flick their tails right and left as I speak them,' said Bernard. 'They wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks, now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together.'

‘Those are yellow words, those fiery words’, said Jinny. ‘I should like a fiery dress to wear in the evening.’  
‘Each tense,’ said Neville, means differently. There is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step. For this is only a beginning’  
(TW, 14).

With *Susan* the rhythm is steady, words are like stones. With *Bernard*, on the other hand, the rhythm now moves this way, now that way, words flick, wag, move together and individually. And with *Jinny*, the rhythm of the line moves like in a warm sensuous bath:

‘I should like a fiery dress to wear in the evening.’ With *Neville*, words have their order and structure, which is always exact, and this structure does not allow for rhythm and flow.

Although dialogue hardly exists, the reader sometimes gets the impression that each character has ‘heard’ what another character has said, as in the Hampton Court scene:

‘In this silence’, said Susan, ‘it seems as if no leaf would ever fall, or bird fly.’  
‘As if the miracle had happened,’ said Jinny, ‘and life were stayed here and now.’  
‘And’ said Rhoda, ‘we had no more to live.’  
‘But listen’, said Louis, ‘to the world moving through the abysses of infinite space.’  
(TW, 172-3)

It is as if the communication takes place on a different level, and the characters seem to speak to each other into a vast space of silence.

Sometimes the speeches move towards rhythmic ‘conversation’, as the characters weave into each other through interwoven sentences: ‘*It is hate, it is love,*’ said Susan... ‘*It is love,*’ said Jinny, *it is hate*, such as Susan feels for me because I kissed Louis once in the garden’ (TW, 103). Neville talks to Susan: ‘But your eyes, Susan, full of turnips and cornfields, disturb me. Listen to me, Susan’ (TW, 163). Susan and Bernard are close to each other, as are Rhoda and Louis:

Look, Rhoda,’ said Louis, they have become nocturnal, rapt. Their eyes are like moth’s wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all.

The rhythm also springs out of the notion of ‘expansion- contraction.’ This is a rhythm that breathes like the human heart, in and out. In the prelude the image of the sky that is lit up expands in a ‘crescendo’ movement:

Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it *higher and higher until a broad flame became visible*; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold.’ (Prelude, my italics)

The expanded image of the sun which ‘breathes out’ in the sky, continues in an inbreathing rhythm in Jinny’s experience of burning and shivering: ‘*I burn, I shiver,*’ said Jinny, ‘*out of this*

*sun*, into this shadow' (TW, 7, my italics). In the second draft of the manuscript, there is a passage which describes the burning spot out of which her image arises:

Here I burn, said Jinny: I am clammy here. There was now a burning spot on the horizon; as if a woman had raised her lamp & all the fine threads on the surface of the sea had frizzled; become caught fire; were glowing behind her green; were rising above it, very slowly, brilliantly firmer, softly burning, suddenly broadly lighting & the film of the soft fibres were alight & all the air were made of fibre, of red light. (Draft II, 404)

The flaming image in the sky infiltrates the character of Jinny, reflecting and intensifying the image. She becomes the *centre* in the room, where now the lamps are lit. The expansive light from the sun is condensed into the glowing light of the lamp:

Then when the lamps were lit, I should put on my red dress and it would be as thin as a veil, and would wind about my body, and billow out as I came into the room, pirouetting. (TW, 24)

Neville and Bernard mirror each other, both uniting in the motif of silence. Neville represents the contracted image which then is expanded in Bernard's expansive 'drop of silence':

Now this room seems to me central, something scooped out of the eternal night. Outside lines twist and intersect, but round us, wrapping us about. Her we are centred. Her we can be silent. Or speak without raising our voices. Did you notice that and then that? We say....Anyhow, I heard voices, a sob on the stair late at night...Thus we spin round us infinitely fine filaments and construct a system...' (Neville, 136)

In *Rhoda* the energy gathers in the depth of her being, through her expression of longing and despair in the reverberating question '*O, to whom?*' This profound question arises from the centre of her being, and this emotion forms the essence of a character who otherwise struggles to be focussed. The vowels rise from the depth and reach out:

'I will sit by the river's trembling edge and look at the water-lilies,...I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them, and present them- Oh! to whom?' (TW, 41)

The movement of opening and shutting becomes a movement of expansion and contraction, which this 'musical' movement illustrates. Jinny introduces Rhoda's *leitmotif*: The door opens. The door goes on opening. Now I think, next time it opens the whole world of my life will be change (TW, 78). Rhoda's soliloquy takes over, and she repeats the motif: 'The door opens; the tiger leaps', which then moves through a crescendo resulting in a desperate cry: 'Hide me, protect me, for I am the youngest, the most naked of you all. Rhoda is 'flung every time the door opens' (TW, 80). The passive sentence construction: 'I am broken into separate pieces; I am no longer one,' is strengthened by repetition and variation of the passive in the next line: 'I am to be broken. I am to be derided all my life.' The wave breaks as a

‘conclusion’, and the music of the movement continues at a slower pace with Rhoda’s expanding movement, becoming the foam that ‘sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness’ (TW, 80).

‘Rippling gold, I say to him, “Come”, said Jinny. ‘And he comes; he crosses the room where I sit, with my dress like a veil billowing round me on the gilt chair. Our hands touch, our bodies burst into fire...All quivers, all kindles, all burns clear.’  
‘Look Rhoda,’ said Louis, ‘they have become nocturnal, rapt. Their eyes are like moth’s wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all.’  
‘Horns and trumpets,’ said Rhoda, ‘ring out. Leaves unfold; the stags blare in the thicket. There is a dancing and a drumming of naked men with assegais.’  
‘Like the dances of savages,’ said Louis, ‘round the camp-fire. They are savage; they are ruthless. They dance in a circle, flapping bladders. The flames leap over their painted faces, over the leopard skins and the bleeding limbs which they have torn from the living body.’  
‘The flames of the festival rise high’, said Rhoda. ‘The great procession passes, flinging green boughs and flowering branches...They throw violets. They deck the beloved with garlands and with laurel leaves, there on the ring of the turf where the steep-backed hills come down. The procession passes. And while it passes, Louis, we are aware of downfalling, we forebode decay... We who are conspirators, withdrawn together to lean over some cold urn, note how the purple flame flows downwards.’ (TW, 105)

There is here a shift of perspective in the novel. Jinny’s shivering and burning has shifted to embrace *all* that shivers and burns. Her sexual behaviour is seen through the eyes of Rhoda and Louis, who in turns build up the rhythm, reaching its climax in Rhoda’s ringing out of horns and trumpets. In this passage, one speaker follows on from the other, and unity is created through *repetition and variation*. This musical experience is expansive, ‘it rings out.’ Then the dance which Rhoda initiates in her poetry, is carried on by Louis: ‘like the *dancing* and the drumming ...’ ‘Like the *dance* of savages.’ The dance is repeated and linked with metonymy in *drumming* and *savages*. Then Louis initiates the image of flame in a new movement, carried on by Rhoda’s repetitions: The *flames* leap over their painted faces,’... ‘The *flames* of the festival rise high.’ Movement upon movement follow each other, until finally the language slows down, and we are told that Louis and Rhoda were conspirators. Everything leading up to this statement, is written like an ecstasy. The language itself has become a metaphor of ‘Jinny’s dance’.

In the last episode of the book, Woolf’s narrator comments on the breathing rhythms of life: ‘Opening, shutting; shutting, opening; eating, drinking; sometimes speaking-the whole mechanism seemed to expand, to contract, like the mains-spring of a clock’ (TW, 200).

Life is pleasant, life is good. The mere process of life is satisfactory. Take the ordinary man in good health. He likes eating and sleeping. He likes the snuff of fresh air and walking at a brisk pace down the Strand. Or in the country there is a cock crowing on a gate...Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday Tuesday. Each spread the same ripple of well-being, repeats the same curve of rhythm; covers fresh sand with a chill or ebbs a little slackly

without. So the being grows rings; identity becomes robust. What was fiery and furtive like a fling of grain cast into the air and blown hither and thither by wild gusts of life from every quarter is now methodical and orderly and flung with a purpose – so it seems.(TW, 201)

The rhythm of life is depicted with a rhythm of its own. The ‘well-being’ adds a variation of ‘being’ as motif. ‘Life is pleasant, life is good,’ echoes the rhythm of ‘I am this, I am that’, which alludes to the recurring theme of ‘identity’. The average human being lives in this kind of life-stream, but on another level Woolf alludes to the writing process itself, that one event always has to lead to another, ‘methodical and orderly’. This happened, and then that happened. Such is the notion of the *story*. When Susan speaks of her everyday actions, the slow repetitive nature of rhythm is captured by the simple present tense:

I go then to the cupboard, and take the damp bags of rich sultanas;  
I lift the heavy flour on to the clean scrubbed kitchen table.  
I knead; I stretch; I pull, plunging my hands in the warm inwards of the dough.(TW, 74)

But the rhythm also breaks as death breaks the rhythm of life. The *third* interlude ends with these words:

The wind rose. The waves drummed on the shore, like a hundred warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep.

The first sentence is short, the beginning of the next long sentence is sharply cut, and the style reflects the warlike mood. Then the swift movement continues like a strong crashing wave.

One particularly interesting diary entry shows that *musical structure* was on Woolf’s mind as she approached the end of *The Waves*:

It occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard’s final speech, & end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes, & having no further break. This is also to show that the theme effort, effort dominates: not the waves: & personality: & defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion. (Diary III, 22 December 1930, 339)

As in music, each set of monologues by the six characters begins with a speech by Bernard and runs through the speeches of the other five before Bernard initiates a new *movement*. But at the beginning of the fifth section, it is not Bernard but Neville who introduces the news of Percival’s death.

From diary entries we know that Virginia Woolf was listening to Beethoven’s quartets while working on *The Waves*. Gerard Levin suggests that J.W.N. Sullivan’s discussions of Beethoven’s late quartets in his 1927 book on Beethoven’s quartets, specifically the B Flat Quartet, the Great Fugue and the C Sharp Minor Quartet contain statements that suggest

major themes of *The Waves*. 'In these quartets', Levin says, 'the movements radiate, as it were, from a central experience.' The stages which are represented are not stages in a journey but independent and existing in their own right. They represent separate experiences, but they derive from a central experience (Levin 1986, 217). The experiences of six characters in *The Waves* evolve around the novel's silent centre, represented by Percival. At the same time they are seen from Bernard's point of view:

Faces recur, faces and faces- they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble- Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole-again like music. What a symphony, with its concord and its discord and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up!

The tunes on top and the bass beneath may be illustrated by Rhoda's experiences of solitude and Jinny's experience of ecstasy. Rhoda expresses her bass tune through a tragic mood in the vowel O: 'Oh, life, how I have dreaded you, oh, human beings, how I have hated you. And her deep longing comes to expression in the even deeper vowel oo which beats like the gong: 'O, to whom!' Jinny, on the other hand, sings her love song, and the tune is light: 'Come, come, come, jug jug, jug'. Rhoda's line stretches out in the elongated vowels, whereas Jinny's words are short, imitating bird song.

The purpose of musical style in *The Waves* is to maintain an ongoing experience, a structure that seems never to end. The movement at the end takes another leap, and *death* here does not have the melancholic mood as in Rhoda's bass, it moves forward with energy: 'It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself unyielding, O Death!' (TW, 228) Although the novel ends with conflict, the waves round it off by their own rhythm: 'The waves broke on the shore'.

In this chapter we have seen that the *narrator's voice* is composed by various narrative devices, of which *the lady writing / the lonely mind*, and *Bernard* are the most distinct ones. On a deeper level the lady writing shapes the language of novel as she represents the author's writing process, eliminating and concentrating words and sentences in a condensed poetic style. Being able to enter the depth of the other characters' thoughts, Bernard represents a collective consciousness as well as being a central character that moves from the centre of his 'I'. The lady, on the other hand, possesses anonymous powers and shapes the novel from the periphery. The *monologues* in streams of consciousness give the novel a lonely voice which varies between soliloquy and interior monologue. The soliloquy has a stronger dramatic effect

in its concentrated form, where the character speaks out to an audience. In interior monologue the character speaks to him/herself in an impressionist way. This dreamy state of mind has a more inward effect.

I have suggested that the moments of being in the characters' lives are related to Woolf's own life and that she used her characters to show transient states of mind which to her were familiar. Furthermore I have related some of the scenes which illustrate central moments in *The Waves* to Woolf's autobiographical writing: *Moments of Being*. We have seen that these states of mind may communicate the intensity of a life experience which may embrace the experience of death. The state of consciousness is expressed differently in each moment. Sometimes it is expanded by the experience of the past (Louis) or the present (Jinny), or the connection between past and present may be abrupt (Rhoda). Rhythm, repetition and variation build the characters' inner conflicts, and the characters are created from images which represent a centre – periphery consciousness. Rhythm unites sentences through their rise and fall, and it unites the characters' speeches with each other as one speaker takes over from another. Like in music, Bernard's speeches initiate a new movement, and Percival represents the central experience of the novel around which the other six characters evolve. We see from these devices that they all represent two principles of life: breathing in and out, expansion and contraction.



## Chapter 3: Imagery and symbol

In this chapter we will pay attention to the characters as they are characterized metaphorically. Each character has his/her individual quality and point of view, and each is attached to his/her own symbol. Bernard is tied to his curiosity, Susan to her jealousy and need to possess, Rhoda to her fear, Jinny to her sensuousness and need for admiration, Neville to his need for order and intellectual clarity, Louis to his fear and his social insecurity. Some of the characters' images will be related to other characters, as it is through *common imagery* that they are presented in the narrative. The second half of this chapter, 'Shared imagery and symbols', brings together the individual characters and develops an understanding of the web which exists between the characters and what is outside them, on a spiritual level. My concern is to link the images and symbols which 'light up' the consciousness of the characters with the symbols illustrating their 'oneness'. I will illustrate the symbolic meaning of the Holy Grail and essential cluster images, which allude to the notions of *mind, ego, self* and *reality*.

### Character as metaphor

What I now think is that I can give in a very few strokes the *essentials* of a person's character.<sup>11</sup>  
(AWD, 157, my italics)

Virginia Woolf did not draw characters in outline; she did not sum up men and women. May be she did not want her characters to be defined with a constant identity. In *The Waves* she wanted to 'paint in a few strokes' the essentials of a person's character. This required a concentrated form, and the author chose to use condensed and elliptic similes to create her characters. Thus they exist in terms of similes and recurrent clusters of images. The characters' joyful or sad experiences of significant moments in their lives, are communicated in an imaginative way, by the use of metaphors.

Furthermore, in *The Waves* 'character' is closely related to 'plot'. By 'plot' I here mean an inner creative force, initiated by inner events and conflicts which have been shaped into a plot. Plot requires transformation, the dynamic shaping force in the narrative discourse which in this novel, is related to inner conflicts in a person's life.

In the last episode of *The Waves*, Bernard sums up his friends in these words:

The crystal., the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has *walls of Thinnest air*. If I press, then all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only *a string of little fish* that let themselves be caught, while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. Faces recur, faces and faces- they press their beauty to *the walls of my bubble*- Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny,

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<sup>11</sup> 19 April 1930

Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole-again like music.(TW, 197, my italics)

He sees his friends as ‘a string of six little fishes, pressing their beauty to ‘the walls of his bubble’; his mind. The image of ‘a string of little fish’ is developed as a *simile*: ‘they bubble like boiling silver’. The ‘globe’ as ‘sphere’ has symbolic significance of all those images which take part in this wholeness, and the crystal may be viewed as a part of this globe, signifying its ‘centre’. The ‘globe’ which may be viewed as a metaphor for the ‘mind’ expands and comprehends ‘life’, the ‘globe of life’. The ‘bubble’ is contiguous with ‘globe’ and is personified as it alludes to ‘my mind’. These two images related by means of metonymy, are at the same time metaphors for the ‘mind’ on which impressions have made their impact.

Who are they: ‘This streaming away mixed with Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda; Louis...A new assembly of elements? (TW, 215). Bernard characterizes them using metaphors, acknowledging that with them he is many sided. He sees Louis; *stone-carved, sculpturesque*, Neville; *scissor-cutting, exact*; Susan with *eyes like lumps of crystal*, Jinny *dancing like a flame, febrile, hot over dry earth*, and Rhoda; *the nymph of the fountain always wet*. These pictures drums Bernard alive, he says (TW, 87). Louis has a grey flannel with a *snake belt*. Rhoda has a *basin in which she sails petals of white flowers* (TW, 184). Susan cries ‘I love, I hate’, *twisting her pocket handkerchief* (TW, 191).Neville is always seeking out one person to sit beside. Jinny is like a crinkled poppy, febrile, thirsty with the desire to drink dust. ‘How am I to distinguish my life from theirs? I am not one person, I am many people’, Bernard says (TW, 212). His acknowledgement of himself, as being ‘many people’, suggests that the characters have a common consciousness. He is part of them, and they are part of him.

Questions repeatedly posed by the characters include: What is life? What is love? What is reality? Who am I? Percival, the seventh character in the novel, is mainly ‘present’ through his ‘absence.’ He is the novel’s silent centre: ‘Loneliness and silence often surrounded him’ (TW, 114). He is seen through the eyes and imagination of the others, and he acts as a catalyst for their feelings (Lee 1977, 166). His death in the fifth episode has significance for their development: ‘It’s Percival’, said Louis... ‘who makes us aware that these attempts to say, “I am this, I am that”, which we make, coming together, like separate parts of *one body*, and *soul*, are false’...We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a *chain* whirling round, round, in a steel- blue circle, beneath’ (TW, 103, my italics). Percival seems to gather the friends: ‘We are drawn into this communion by some deep common emotion. Shall we call it,

conveniently, 'love'? Shall we say love of Percival' because Percival is going to India?' Behind this statement there is a vision of reality as a timeless unity which lies beneath the appearances of change, separation and disorder in life.

Whether Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda are 'a single being', or six separate, complementary existences, their function as members of a group is to approach that wholeness of being represented by their hero, Percival, whose journey to India is a journey in search of the Grail (Stewart 1972, 438). According to M. L. von Franz, the Grail itself symbolizes that inner wholeness for which men always have been searching. Their six-sided flower, made of six lives forms a mandala image, symbolizing the all-important centre of the psyche...'the nuclear atom whose essence we do not know'(von Franz 1969, 165, 213, 215). Thus the six characters can be considered as aspects of the author's search for inner wholeness.

### **Louis - stone-carved, sculpturesque, in his grey flannel with a snake belt**

According to Bernard, Louis was 'the best scholar in the school' (TW, 68). He is 'the solemn boy who dips his pen with deliberation writing firm and clear letters' (Draft I, 10). The author describes her meeting with him in the first draft of *The Waves*:

It was a garden, & the corner of a garden; & and there Louis, the Australian boy stood, while the other children hooted & catcalled & and skimmed the flowerbeds with their butterfly nets, under the thin broad leaves like bats wings, but green; & in the green air swam, like tropical fish, very transparent flowers made of purple light. He stood there, pressing the hollow tube of a stalk, so that the sticky drops oozed. He stood there in the middle of the path, & thought; fantastically, how he was rooted there, but with roots that went down to the middle of the earth; & his went down through the ages, so that he had seen the pyramids building...was not able to move from one spot to another; had no connection with the hand that held the stalk...(Draft I, 73)

This experience is described in the final work of *The Waves*:

I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left here standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early before breakfast, before lessons...I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through the earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre...Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake'. (TW, 7)

The earth is weighing him down, and he sees women carrying red pitchers on their heads by the Nile:

Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear trappings, tremblings stirrings round me.(Ibid.)

This childhood experience seems to have had a deep effect on Louis, lasting throughout his life. He sees himself 'down there' as a stone figure in an Egyptian desert. This indicates that he has had a glimpse of himself living in a different time, being incarnated in Egypt. For a child this must have been a very lonely experience. He recalls what he has seen: 'I find relics of myself in the sand that women made thousands of years ago, when I heard the songs by the Nile and the chained beasts stamping' (TW, 95). When Louis speaks of his body going down to the depths of the world, the image stands for his sense of history. He is drawn far back in time, but he also predicts his own future and describes the way he has come into this world: 'I, Louis, who shall walk on the earth these 70 years, am born entire, out of hatred, out of discord (TW, 28). Louis' concept of 'time' is inclusive: 'I seem already to have lived many thousand years... but if I shut my eyes, I fail to realize the meeting place of past and present' (TW, 48).

The boy is 'held' rooted in his experience, being drawn back to his experience in Egypt, as in a meditation, when suddenly Jinny dashes into his life and kisses him. It is this kiss which establishes his connection with Jinny. She describes her experience of the kiss:

Louis with his eyes fixed. Is he dead? I thought and kissed you, with my heart jumping under my pink frock, like the leaves, which go on moving, though there is nothing to move them. I dance, I ripple. I am thrown over you in a net of light. I lie quivering over you. 'Jinny ran into the green light... stamped like a snake's skin & kissed him...Gloom filled the air. Yet he had not wished it'.  
He had not wished to be woken up from his experience, feeling 'buried in the sand, conscious of the tread of armies & of some movement in the tides (of the earth - of some continuity & purpose & indeed reason & steady beat & increase & fulfilment & and of being sealed up forever.'  
(Draft I, 74, 75)

Suddenly he steps out of his 'pre-birth' experience, and stands there before us in his grey flannel suit, putting off his majestic apparel, this great 'globe'. And now, he is the little boy, on the path: 'Louis whose parents were in Australia, whose father was a banker in Brisbane.' What a contrast! The author creates a sense of 'discord' by describing two very different situations in a historical perspective. And Louis cannot see the connection between them; he is born out of discord. He feels chained to his past, he does not seem to be able to break free, as he says: 'I hear something stamping'. This metaphor recurs as his 'leitmotif' many times in *The Waves*: 'I hear something stamping. A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps and stamps and stamps' (TW, p. 5). The 'beast stamping' is a metaphor for Louis' fear, and its 'chained foot' is a metaphor for his feeling of being tied to the past. When he leaves school, he feels he

has no firm ground under his feet: 'Now I hang suspended without attachment...and I have no firm ground to which I go...I go vaguely, to make money vaguely'(TW, 47). He feels inferior to Neville and Bernard, being sons of gentlemen: 'Whereas his friends boast and talk, slipping into 'cushioned fire-lit rooms,' he will tilt on an office chair behind a counter', envying them. At the same time he seeks the *protective waves* of the ordinary: Feeling isolated as a child, he seeks an ordered life as an adult, working in his office: 'I am an average Englishman. I am an average clerk' (TW, 69). Everyday seems the same at work: 'I, however, Louis, 'sat in my office and tore the date from the calendar, and announced to the world of ship-brokers, corn-handlers and actuaries that Friday the tenth, or Tuesday the eighteenth, had dawned on the city of London.' Reaching middle age, he admits: 'Life has been a terrible affair for me. I am like some vast sucker, some glutinous, some adhesive insatiable mouth...I am not a single and passing being. My life is not a moment's bright spark like that on the surface of a diamond. I go beneath the ground tortuously, as if a warder carried a lamp from cell to cell'(TW, pp 154, 155). The last image has something in common with Jinny. And yet it serves as a contrast to her life and to her sensuous bright spark of the moment, her body being the lamp that shows the way for her.

Hermione Lee points out that Louis' imaginary journey to his past is not a terrified flight from the real world. It becomes rather a source of strength. Although, like Rhoda, he too fears the world, but he does not escape from it (Lee 1986, 114). I concur with this observation. He has struggled to find the balance between his artistic nature and his office work. Finally he sums up what life has taught him: 'My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of our history, of our tumultuous and varied day.'

### **Rhoda - the bird that sings by the bedroom alone**

Rhoda's character is timid, like Louis. The image of the bird symbolizes her timidity and loneliness: 'The birds sang in chorus first', said Rhoda. 'Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom alone' (TW, 6). She hears the timid sound of 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp' of a solitary bird. Rhoda's imagery of her childhood fantasies, of playing with her white petal ships, is echoed throughout her life. She lives in a dreamland of swallows, white petals and pillars.

In a scene from the classroom Louis characterizes Rhoda in a simile: 'Her shoulder-blades meet across her back *'like the wings of a small butterfly'* (TW, 15). She has no body as the others have, and no face either:

‘That is my face’, said Rhoda. ‘in the looking-glass behind Susan’s shoulder-that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide 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 a real world. The things they lift are heavy, they say No; whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second.  
(TW, 30, 31)

Jinny describes Rhoda’s face as ‘mooning, vacant, completed *like those white petals she used to swim in the bowl*’ (TW, 30). As a school girl she feels that she is not being seen, and she feels robbed of her identity. This experience grows inside her, and she is unable to free herself from it. ‘But here I am *nobody*. I have *no face*’ (TW, 24), becomes a leitmotif throughout her life.

When Louis describes himself as a ‘ghost’ of himself, he echoes the light feathery impression of Rhoda in his metaphor: ‘in the early morning *petals float on fathomless depths and the birds sing*’ (TW, 49). Rhoda finds it difficult to make decisions, like Louis she hesitates. She has to place her foot carefully on the ground or else she feels that she may fall off the ‘edge of the world’ into nothingness (TW, 31). She has to knock her body against some hard surface to be able to feel herself in her body, so that she does not ‘fly off’, being suspended. At the threshold of crossing a puddle, a crucial moment of her life, her feeling of identity fails once more. She cannot meet the physical world:

Also, in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay in the courtyard, when, holding an envelope, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. *We are nothing*, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather. I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself *back into the body* over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle. This is life then to which I am committed!  
(TW, 47, my italics)<sup>12</sup>

She does, however, manage to realize the inevitability of living in her body, and she feels bound to life as a body to a wild horse. The same leitmotif leads to the motif of death: ‘Unless I can stretch and touch something hard, I shall be blown down the eternal corridors forever...’ (TW, 120). To Rhoda ‘life emerges heaving its dark crests from the sea’ (TW, 47). Life alludes to death, and they seem closely woven together. The ‘dark crests from the sea’ is a metaphor of death being a part of life. There is no way out of the dark, hollow nothingness that she experiences, and she feels as if she is being carried away by the waves:

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<sup>12</sup> In ‘A Sketch of the Past’ (*Moments of Being*, p.90) the author describes a scene from her childhood: ‘There was the moment of the puddle in the past; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something...the whole world became unreal’.

I am to be broken. I am to be derided all my life. I am to be cast up and down among men and women, with their twitching faces, with their lying tongues, like a cork on a rough sea. Like a ribbon of weed I am flung far every time the door opens...I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl here in this room. (TW, 80)

Fear takes a firm hold of her, as a tiger that leaps towards her: '*The door opens; the tiger leaps*', she says. She feels threatened: 'The door opens; terror rushes in, terror upon terror pursuing me' (TW, 78). The 'shock of sensation' leaps upon her, like a tiger.

From the depths of her emotions there is a wish to be attached to somebody to whom she can give warmth and love, and in this strong undercurrent there is a desperate call for love. Sitting by the moonlit pond with the water-lilies lighting up, Rhoda captures her mood in a poetically beautiful way. Her longing for love rings out like a gong, reverberating its deep sound: 'Oh, to whom?'

I will sit her by the river's trembling edge and look at the water-lilies, broad and bright, which lit the oak that overhung the hedge with moonlight beams of their own watery light. I will pick flowers; I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them and present them-O! to whom?  
(TW, 41)

But when somebody comes she is unable to give herself to a person. She does not know what to say: 'But what answer shall I give? I am thrust back into this ill-fitting body to receive the shafts of his indifference and his scorn, I who long for *marble columns*, and *pools on the other side of the world* where *the swallow dips her wings*' (TW, 78). The image of 'the swallow that dips her wings in dark pools' reflects, in a sense, the image of 'the fin in a waste of waters', to which Bernard refers (TW, 189). The fin of the porpoise arises from the sea and the wing of the swallow dips down from the sky to meet it. The image of 'pools on the other side of the world' alludes to the world Rhoda longs for the spiritual world. Eventually a feeling of despair leads her to suicide.

### **Jinny - dancing like a flame, febrile, hot over dry earth**

There was no past, no future, merely the moment in its ring of light and our bodies; the Inevitable climax, the ecstasy. She was like a crinkled poppy, febrile, thirsty of the desert to drink dust. Darting. Angular, not the least impulsive, she came prepared. So little flames zigzag over the cracks of the earth. (Bernard)

As we see from this excerpt, Jinny lives fully in the present with all her senses. She is like a poppy, thirsty, but burnt out. Her opening image: '*I see a crimson tassel, twisted with gold*

*threads*' (TW, 5), is a concentrated metaphor for the image of the burning spot on the horizon, to which we referred in the chapter on 'Rhythm and musical elements'.<sup>13</sup> In the character of Jinny, the experience of the moment is intensified, as a contrast to Bernard's experience of that silence which point beyond human experience. Jinny lives entirely in the moment with her whole body. She is the character who is most at home in her body. She is all body, and she is unable to distinguish her consciousness from it:

I see myself entire. I see my body and my head in one now; for even in this serge frock they are one, my body and my head. Look, when I move my head I ripple all down my narrow body; even my thin legs ripple like a stalk in the wind. (TW, 30)

Here the image of the stalk is used, linking her bodily experience to Louis' experience, being drawn out of his body, experiencing his past. Jinny is unable to see her past. In the manuscript, she tells Louis that she lives her life day by day, and that her life has neither past nor future (Draft I, 219). Her imagination is the 'body's': 'My body lives a life of its own' (TW, 46), she says, and she enjoys 'the great society of bodies' as a young woman. Most of her images are related to her bodily experience. Jinny is able to open and shut her body at will: '*I open my body, I shut my body at will*' (TW, 47). This 'leitmotif' which recurs many times throughout the text, contributes to build her character. As it develops as metaphor in the discourse, it alludes to Rhoda's leitmotif 'the door opens, and terror rushes in': 'I also like fair haired men with blue eyes. *The door opens. The door goes on opening.*' The next time the door opens, she thinks her whole life will be changed. Jinny's *door* opens up for love, a force which counteracts Rhoda's fear. Jinny continues to seek her moments of ecstasy. Her need for admiration is shown in the prelude leading up to her 'dance': 'I glance, I peep, I powder. My hair is swept in one curve. My lips are precisely red. I am ready now to join men and women on the stairs, my peers' (TW, 75). She describes at a party a room with the society of bodies, in which she partakes. She does not know the members of the group: 'Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world. Among the lustrous green, pink pearl-grey woman stand upright the bodies of men. They are black and white...' Her sensuous physical relationship to men illustrates the intensity that she experiences through the moment: 'The black and white figures of unknown men look at me as I lean forward...I feel a thousand capacities spring in me...He approaches. He makes towards me. This is the most exciting moment I have ever known. I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted, so that he may come to me. "Come", I say, "come"... I am broken off: I fall with him; I am carried off...' (TW, 76).

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<sup>13</sup> See p. 39



Jinny feels at home in *her* image of the sea: 'We yield to this slow flood... In and out, we are swept now in this large figure; it holds us together'. She seeks the moment: 'There! That is my moment of ecstasy. Now it is over.' But after her sexual adventurous moment: 'slackness invades us... We have lost consciousness of our bodies uniting under the table'. She will continue to sing her love song: 'Come, come, come, jug, jug, jug.' True to her animal-like nature and the calling of her body, she trembles and quivers with passion. She will not let herself be attached to one person only (like Neville), or be imprisoned (like Louis).

### **Susan - with eyes like lumps of crystal**

Jinny kissing Louis, in the garden where the book opens, is an event that affects all the children. The jealousy it arouses in Susan, makes her perceive her body as 'short and squat': 'I saw her kiss him. I looked between the leaves and saw her. She danced in flecked with diamonds light as dust. And I am squat, Bernard, I am short' (TW, 9). In Bernard's words it was Susan who first became 'wholly woman, purely feminine'. 'It was she who dropped on my face those scolding tears which are terrible, beautiful; both, neither. She was born to be adored of poets, since poets require safety; someone who sits sewing, who says, "I hate, I love."' (TW, 190). As a child Susan feels low, near the ground and the insects: '*I have eyes that look close to the ground and see insects in the grass. The yellow warmth in my side, turned to stone when I saw Jinny kiss Louis* (TW, p.9). As she grows to be a young woman, she lives more and more through her senses feeling at home in her body. She differs from Jinny in that she is able to distinguish between consciousness and body (Hussey 1986, 9). She is uninterested in the artificial: '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' (TW, 39).

At school in Switzerland some 'hard thing' had formed in her side: 'For something has grown in me here, through the winters and summers, on staircases, in bedrooms... gradually I shall turn over the *hard thing* that has grown here in my side' (ibid.). It is this 'hard thing' which seems to have formed her character. It was the *yellow warmth in her side that turned to stone* when she saw Jinny kiss Louis (TW, 9). The concentrated image of a 'screwed up handkerchief', reinforces the suppression in her character: '*Now I will wrap my agony inside my pocket handkerchief. It shall be screwed tight into a ball*' (TW, 8). The handkerchief holds in it all her locked up feelings, causing much suffering in her isolated soul.

Bernard, however, has seen the beauty of Susan when her eyes were full of tears and he tries to comfort her:

'I saw you go', said Bernard. 'As you passed the door of the tool-house I heard you cry "I am unhappy"... When I heard you cry I followed you, and saw you put down your handkerchief, screwed up, with its rage, with its hate, knotted in it. But soon it will cease. Our bodies are close now. You hear me breathe. You see the beetle too carrying off a leaf on its back. It runs this way, then that way, so that even your desire when you watch the beetle, to possess one single thing (it is Louis now) must waver, like the light in and out of the beech leaves; and then words, moving darkly, in the depths of your mind will break up this *knot of hardness*, screwed up in your pocket-handkerchief. (TW, 10, my italics)

Bernard's tears 'loosen up' Susan's agony. The effect of his action shows the characters' impact on each other. The feeling of hate 'knotted in the handkerchief' develops in Susan an attitude of life, a love/ hate attitude towards people and the world: 'I love', said Susan, 'and 'I hate'(TW, 10). 'Later on in life, she says: 'The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate, rage and pain' (TW, 98). Elsewhere, her assessment of her self is much more differentiated:

'I do not know myself. I do not separate myself. I am white in the dawn; & then blaze with all the August stars at night...I want to give; to give, to give...' (Draft II, 502)

Possession is central to Susan's character. By possessing all that is around her, she can create her own world through her body. '*At this hour I am the field, I am the barn. I am the trees; mine are the flocks of birds, and this young hare who leaps, at the last moment when I step almost on him.*' And she is at one with the seasons: '*I am the seasons*, I think sometimes, January, May, November: the mud, the mist, the dawn.' In the manuscript, she says in the simile: '*I shall be like a field bearing crops in rotation*' (Draft I, 223). Her character is at one with nature, formed *as nature*. Bearing crops in rotation like the seasons, may also be a metaphor for the circle she feels tied to: '*I am fenced in, planted here like one of my own trees*. I say, 'My son'', I say, "My daughter"... (TW, 146). She has grown trees from the seed, but she feels herself tied to her own 'plantation', planted there like her trees.

Susan seeks the 'natural happiness' that the children can give her: But within she feels a dark violent force which disturbs her beautiful mood around the cradle of her child: 'Sleep, I say, and feel within me some darker violence, so that I would feel down with one blow any intruder, any snatcher, who should break into this room and wake the sleeper' (TW, 131). This anger and agony within her break the harmony of the 'circle' that she is a part of. When Susan's children have grown up, a feeling of not having been fulfilled begins to weigh on her. She has experienced her 'natural happiness' through her children: 'Yet sometimes I am sick of natural happiness, and fruit growing, and children scattering the house with oars, guns...and other trophies. I am sick of the body...' (TW, 146, 147). She reflects on how love has made knots in her, how she has been torn apart in her experience of love and jealousy:

‘My body has been used daily, rightly, like a tool by a good workman all over (TW, 165).  
‘Still I gape, like a young bird, unsatisfied, for something that has escaped me’, she says.

### **Neville - scissor-cutting, exact**

In the first draft of *The Waves* the character of Neville appears before us as

the slim and eel like boy who & seemed to step through the water without dislodging it, this body was so thin, so smooth, who seemed always to cut open the squat book of leaves like a paper knife, very clearly & dexterously; sometimes, in his glancing progress he would stop & look at the group by the door to listen; in case something was said that was serviceable. But what purpose could it serve? What was he in search of? Often his eyes were full of tears & anger: & tears & mockery; & jealousy & anger; & love & anger; & often they clouded in a dark stare; looked leathern, indifferent; seemed about to inflict some stab or blow; & then the tension relaxed; he fell back again into despair; into laxity; into letting the thing take its way... (Draft I, 26)

If there is one incident in Neville’s life which has affected him deeply, that was the moment when his friend Percival died:

Now agony begins; now the horror has seized me with its fangs,’ said Neville. ‘Now the cab comes; now Percival goes. What can we do to keep him? How bridge the distance between us? ...How signal to all time to come that we, who stand in the street together, in the lamplight, loved Percival? Now Percival is gone.’(TW, 110)

He feels an intense and painful loneliness, yet at the same time he ‘welcomes’ it:

‘From this moment I am solitary.’ ... ‘Yet you shall not destroy me. For this moment, this one moment, we are together. I press you to me. Come, pain, feed on me. Bury your fangs in my flesh. Tear me asunder. I sob, I sob’. (TW, 115)

Neville is good at languages; the exactitude of Latin suits him. ‘With Neville, let’s discuss Hamlet’, says Bernard, summing up his friends in the last section of *The Waves* (TW, 197). ‘It was Neville who changed our *time*’, says Bernard: ‘*He who had been thinking with the unlimited time of the mind, which stretches in a flash from Shakespeare to ourselves*’ (TW, 210). Neville is an intellectual, and the image of the ‘knife’ becomes a symbol of his intellect (Thakur 1965, 110). He spends his time in the libraries exploring the classics, as well as lying on the grass with his friends under the trees. He looks up towards the trees and the sky, as a contrast to Susan who looks down towards the earth and insects. Neville seeks order, he does not like Byronic untidiness. He wants to feel ‘the crystal, the globe of life’, and he wants it to be ‘hard and cold to the touch’ (TW, 197). According to Thakur, Virginia Woolf used ‘the globe’ as an image for perfected life, which one tries to shape ‘round, whole, and entire from the confusion of chaos’. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* 110. According to Thakur, Virginia Woolf used the image of ‘the globe’ in *Jacob’s Room* (91) and *Night and Day*, 533

There is also has another side to his character regarding his love life: we know that he has a kind of relationship with Jinny, who is very different from him. And the relationship is not a stable one. He describes his meeting and parting with her:

By five I knew you were faithless. I snatched the telephone and the buzz, buzz, buzz of its stupid voice in your empty room battered my heart down, when the door opened and there you stood. That was the most perfect of our meetings. But these meetings, these partings, finally destroy us.' (TW, 136)

Love becomes a burden to Neville. He has a close relationship to Bernard who, like himself, is a person of words, but their approaches are very different. It is, however, hard to describe Neville without comparing him to Bernard, as the two of them represent different approaches to language. While Bernard loves talking about people, Neville says of him: 'Let him burble on with his story while I lie back and regard the stiff-legged figures of the padded batsmen through the trembling grasses... *I look up, through the trees, into the sky*' (TW, 27).

Woolf describes the difference between Bernard and Neville thus: Neville was 'so much more intense than Bernard' (Draft I, 165). To Neville,

the poem should contain not a single extra word. It should be the very opposite in every respect of Bernard's essay, where the metaphors really did not help one to see anything... Every thing ought to be absolutely exact, absolutely hard, absolutely relevant. What is detestable is Bernard's confusion, lack of order. Every word should be locked into place. (Draft I, 167)

There is a half-love, half-hate relationship between them, which seems to last throughout their lives. This relationship is depicted in the first draft, after Bernard and Neville have recognized each other.

Then suddenly Neville himself felt No; he could not hold fast to himself. Bernard's generosity was too great. Bernard had always been very generous; had liked his poetry. Bernard; although he had meant to have tea & then, when he felt hat & cheerful & full of ideas, to sit down & scribble down that letter, very dashingly, yet seriously too-well here was Neville; & he perceived his curious clarity of such extreme decision. Now it would be very interesting to be alone together they both thought. Something might happen, something might come yet- as if they proposed to mix, Bernard a little of Neville, Neville a little of Bernard, together... He looked at Neville lying back in the armchair. It may be love- it may be nothing, what is the exact quality of this silence? But it was impossible to task this calmly; for the fact of being silent was in itself uncomfortable- such was the extraordinary force of Neville's character. (Draft I, 168,169,172)

The author then describes how Neville suddenly, with his restless and angular movements, starts to wander about the room, irritable and yet excited: "he began to fizz-that is to feel his own feelings merging with someone else feelings." Something had changed in him, and he stopped and said "Will you read my poem?" (Draft I, 173). But Neville holds on to himself; trying to convince himself that he is 'himself': 'I am one person-myself', not like Bernard:

'now Tolstoy's young man', then 'Byron's young man' (TW. 64). Then something happens to him. There is a moment when he feels inspired, his words 'toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again'. This inspiration fills him with tears. Feeling this inspiration he describes the experience:

Something now leaves me; something goes from me to meet that figure who is coming and assures me that I know him before I see who it is. How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office one's friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, who am I? (TW, 61, 62)

This passage echoes the previously mentioned meeting between the two poets in the first draft. In the first draft Neville and Bernard's experience of each other is described more fully than in the final version. In latter the relationship is condensed: Neville's self which is mixed up with Bernard, leads to the essential question: 'Who am I?' In real life too, we are measured by our friends. It is through other people we get to know ourselves. Through meetings with other people we change. Neville changes as character the moment he is able to share his poetry with Bernard.

### **Bernard - with phrases like rings of smoke**

Bernard is a central character in *The Waves*. He is the character who holds the friends together in his web. This is suggested in his opening phrase: '*Look at the spider's web on the corner of the balcony. It has beads of water on it, drops of white light*' (TW, 5). As a child he draws attention to the 'community of friends': 'But when we sit together, close...we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory (TW, 10).

Further he states his belief in human relationship: 'I do not believe in separation. We are not single' (TW, 50). 'The point of the story', says Virginia Woolf in the first draft, 'is the phrasemaking'. In *A Sketch of the Past* she describes how her own ideas bubble inside her:

Blowing bubbles out of a pipe gives the feeling of the rapid crowd of ideas and scenes which blew out of my mind, so that my lips were syllabbling of their own accord as I walked. What blew the bubbles? Why then? (MOB, 81)

Inspired by the sense of her own creative mind, she builds the character of Bernard:

It seems to me that a child must have a curious focus; it sees an air-ball or a shell with extreme distinctness; I still see the air-balls, blue and purple, and the ribs of the shells, but these points are enclosed in vast empty spaces.' (MOB, 78)

Bernard is a curious character, who *blows his bubbles of phrases*, full of ideas, as he *swings his stick*. He has the habit of making phrases and identifies himself with this phrasemaking. The ‘ebb and flow of the tide of life’, however, impel Bernard’s feelings in two opposite directions. One of them is his love for poetry writing, and the other is his listening activity, for what lies beyond words, words that ‘reach into the silence’, to quote a phrase from *Burnt Norton* by T.S. Eliot (Eliot 1986, 17).<sup>15</sup> His two motifs are therefore phrasemaking and silence.

His feeling of identity is utterly dependant on his use of language: ‘*When I cannot see words curling like smoke round me I am in darkness-I am nothing.*’ (TW, 99) As a young man he wishes to identify his being with an illusionary veil of words: ‘Then how lovely the smoke of my phrase is, rising and falling, flaunting and falling, upon red lobsters and yellow fruit, wreathing them into one beauty.’ (TW, 100) ‘*I am a natural coiner of words, a blower of bubbles through one thing and another*’ (TW, 86), he says. But this habit of phrasemaking is gradually transformed and Bernard becomes conscious of what his language needs. He must stop to ‘whip his prose into poetry’ and learn to rely on ‘the little language’ of intimacy, the language that remains half unspoken, the language that children speak :

‘I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry.’ (TW, 227)

He goes on to speak about silence:

How much better is silence; the coffee-cup, the table. How much better to sit here by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here forever with bare things, this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself’. (TW, 227)

He can hear silence fall and sweep its rings to the farthest edges:

‘Drop upon drop’ said Bernard, ‘silence falls. It forms on the roof of the mind and falls into pools beneath. For ever alone, alone, alone, - hear the silence fall and sweep its rings to the farthest edges...’ (TW, 172)

The ‘heard silence’ in this ‘mystical eyeless book’ is a symbol of something which points beyond human experience. This ‘other world’ or ‘reality’ is described by poets and philosophers in various ways. ‘I see a ring’ says Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and

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<sup>15</sup> Compare the following lines from T.S. Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*:

Words after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness...

hangs in a loop of light'. (TW, 5) This image of the 'ring of light' has associations to the metaphysical poets, like these lines written by Henry Vaughan:<sup>16</sup>

I saw Eternity the other night  
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light.

Silence symbolizes that which is eternal, it is expansive. This feeling is portrayed in Bernard's experience: 'As silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another (TW, 159). His 'ordinary' thinking dissolves, and there is a transformation taking place, a transcendence of mind (TW, 172).

Apart from the motifs of 'phrasemaking' and 'silence', the character of Bernard represents the 'many-sided self': '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'. (TW, 212) He says that he is complex and that he is 'more selves than Neville thinks' (TW, 57,66). 'With them I am many-sided', Bernard says (TW, 87). As life continues, Bernard becomes aware of how *identity* depends on circumstances. 'To be myself I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore I cannot be entirely sure what is myself' (TW, 87). Bernard does not really know who he is, as he continually sees himself in the other characters and they see themselves in him. Other people cannot tell us who we are because they see themselves in us and we see ourselves in them. This doubt underlies Bernard's sense of becoming yet another 'I', observing all the others.

In the character of Bernard it is realized that *identity* cannot be fixed by the 'I'. He does not *know* his identity as a unity, but he never tires of describing its perpetual changes: 'For there is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me' (TW, 100). The 'I' is never fixed: "We are swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shade; we make no comparisons; think scarcely ever of I or of you' (TW, 166). Bernard speaks to 'himself' and says: 'Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am most integrated'. For Bernard, Bernard represents that voice that speaks in him when he talks to himself. It suggests a duality; a 'self' regarding a 'self'. But the 'self' that he regards is not necessarily his 'true self', as the 'true self' can transcend the horizons of time and space and has its 'being' in silence.<sup>17</sup>

Bernard tries to sum up his life, considering and including its physical, psychological and spiritual aspects. He even integrates Percival's death into his experience, including Susan's sorrow and Rhoda's death:

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<sup>16</sup> In poem by H.Vaughan: The World. Abrams, ed.1993,1407.

<sup>17</sup> See next chapter: Shared imagery and symbols

Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape on my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar that Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight where she leapt. (TW, 222)

### Shared imagery and symbols

In the fifth episode, named 'Death', the narrator intrudes and comments on the nature of metaphor: "Like" and "like" and "like" –but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?' There is a hint that Percival, by his death has made Rhoda 'see the thing' (TW, 123). In the first draft of *The Waves*, Woolf says that she is not concerned with a single life but with lives together (Draft I, 17). In a letter she explicitly says that the six characters were supposed to be one. The idea behind this important statement is to be found in the same letter, where the author communicates her feelings about herself:

I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into *one* Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feelings. (Letters IV, 1978, 397)<sup>18</sup>

Woolf has already made it clear for us that the six characters were supposed to be one, and that she herself relates to them through her own soul. One may even presume that she here alludes to her sense of her own self, 'the one Virginia'.

The thing is referred to by Louis: 'We have come together to make *one thing*, not enduring- for what endures?-but seen by many eyes simultaneously!' (TW, 95). The merging of these six separate selves, seven if we include Percival, into the one thing... a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves- a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution (ibid.), is achieved at some cost. Each of the six wishes to maintain his or her separateness, wants to assert 'I am this, I am that' (TW, 103). And yet because of their increasing maturity, out of love for each other and for Percival, momentarily they give up their individuality and are able to lose themselves in something larger than themselves. Bernard, being newly engaged and becoming a father, experiences at the same time a loss of his self. This experience prepares us for the similar but more complicated merging of selves at the Farewell party. These experiences suggest that selves can become each other and that the personalities in the novel are not to be isolated. At the Farewell party the characters transcend their individual selves and there is a sense of communion: 'We are drawn into this communion by some deep, common emotion': Shall we call it conveniently, "love"? Shall we say "love for Percival" because Percival is going to

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<sup>18</sup>In *A Reflection of the Other Person*, 27 October 1931.



India?’ ‘No, that is too small, too particular a name, we cannot attach the width and spread our feelings to so small a mark’ (TW, 95).

Percival may be seen as the seventh ‘Septimus’ who converted the six into a magical number of perfect order and makes the seven-folded candelabra of friendship possible after his death (Beer 1996, 66). His has associations to the story of Percival who was in search for the Holy Grail. And according to Marie Louise von Frantz, the Grail itself symbolizes the inner wholeness for which men have always been searching (von Frantz 1969, 215). Whether the six characters are ‘a single being’ or six separate complementary characters, their function as members of a group approaches that wholeness of being represented by Percival. The Hindu word ‘mandala’, which means ‘magic circle’, is a symbolic representation of the centre of the human psyche: the self. In Eastern civilizations, the contemplation of mandala is meant to bring inner peace, a feeling that life has again found its meaning and order. Mandala images are always circular and can be symbolized as the flower, the wheel of the Universe, the sun, the cyclic season and even the clock. According to Cirlot, the celestial flower is a symbolic work of the sun (Cirlot 1967, 105). Thus, the merging of the six separate selves into one seven-sided flower can be viewed in this light. The flower may at the same time form a mandala image, symbolizing the centre of the psyche (von Frantz 1969, 165, 213). Seen from this point of view, the six characters represent aspects of the author’s search for inner wholeness in her struggle to collect herself into ‘one Virginia’.

The ‘first impressions’ of the six children suggest the common experience as much as their differences. Each of the initial image clusters contains subtle hints as to the orientation of each character’s particular mind. As they grow older the voices become more distinct. But the narrative sustains their common consciousness through the general use of images. I have chosen to concentrate on the *globe-stone-ring* cluster as well as the symbol of the *waves*.

Virginia Woolf mentioned the hypnotic effect of *globes* during the period of her work on *The Waves*: ‘I ask myself sometimes whether one is not hypnotized as a child by a silver globe, by life ... I should like to take the globe in my hands and feel it quietly, round, smooth, heavy, and so hold it, day after day!’ (AWD, 138) The globe as sphere has a wholeness which underlies the symbolic significance of all those images which partake of this wholeness, from the idea of the mystic ‘centre’ to that of the world and eternity, the world-soul (Cirlot 1967, 113).

In *The Waves*, Jinny urges: ‘Let us hold it for one moment....love, hatred, by whatever name we call it, *this globe*, whose walls are made of Percival’ (TW, 109). Percival seems to

be the medium for the moment of illumination, 'the swelling and splendid moment created by us from Percival', as Bernard says. 'The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air', says Bernard (TW,197). The globe here alludes to the transparent mind but also to life; 'the globe of life'. The 'wall' has two different symbolic references: the wall of the mind which moves out from the centre of the self, and the wall of the globe made by Percival. The globe made by Percival is in a sense an expanded globe. It contains more than the mind can grasp. In Bernard's mind ideas *globe* themselves: 'Now the idea breaks in my hand...hidden in the depths of my mind. Ideas break a thousand times for once they globe themselves entire. They break, they fall over me' (TW, 119). In the character of Louis, the globe is also associated with the mind: 'And what is this 'being'? To be aware of heat and cold; of light & dark; of sweet & bitter; & then of a core within, to what sensations attached themselves; & then of a *globe* above here in the head (Draft I, 30). In *A Room of One's Own*, the author reflects on the nature of the mind:

The mind is certainly a very mysterious organ, I reflected, drawing my head in from the window ...What does one mean by 'unity of the mind,' I pondered, for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. It can separate itself from people on the street, for example, and think of itself as apart from them...Or it can think with other people spontaneously...It can think back through its fathers or through its mothers, as I have said that a woman writing thinks back through her mothers. (ROO, 145-46)

She is fascinated by the imaginative and emotional powers of the mind, by the way it can attach or detach itself from other people, can think back to times before it even existed. Furthermore, the symbolic meaning of the *globe* may imply that the conscious and the unconscious coalesce when man becomes whole. Dreams, which represent the unconscious part of our psyche, may give us the guidance we need to conduct our inner and outer lives.

The distinction between the 'self speaking to the self', and the 'I' which defines the word of identity, is rather complex. In the character of Bernard, the *I* and the *self* represent two different aspects of his soul and spirit. It seems necessary to distinguish between them.

If we consider man as a whole human being, we know that he consists of body, soul and spirit. Hence he is a citizen of three worlds.<sup>19</sup> Through his body he belongs to the world that he also perceives through his body. Through his soul he constructs for himself his own world, and through his spirit a world reveals itself to him that is exalted above both the others.

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<sup>19</sup> Let us assume that the concept of 'soul' is a simplified term, which embodies many elements, like 'mind', sentient and intellectual consciousness etc. This philosophical discussion lies beyond the concern of this thesis.

The ego and the self are related to the soul and spirit consciousness in different ways. In the soul the I, or the ego, asserts individuality. Likewise, identity is closely related to the ego. Bernard struggles to overcome his ego and his different identities and collect them into a unity. The self, however, may receive the impulse from the spirit and thereby become the bearer of the spiritual human being. Man is rooted in his physical body, and through his 'spiritual' self, he comes to flower in the spiritual world. The soul may be viewed as the stalk that takes root in the one and flowers in the other. Hence Louis' root and stalk imagery may be viewed in this light. Accordingly, Percival may be considered as the flowering of the spirit uniting with the others, who then are symbolized by the flower.

For Bernard, the ego struggles to unite with the true spirit, as he tries to find his true self, overcoming his ego. His feeling of personal identity is dependent on his physical and social existence. During moments of being, this self is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes part of a greater whole.

What is the 'true self'? Speaking of the artist, the author approaches this question when she speaks about silence and when a space is cleared in the mind. 'There is a zone of silence in the middle of every art. The artists themselves live in it,' she says in one of her essays...<sup>20</sup> 'I know that when I write there is something inside me that stops functioning, something that becomes silent', she says.<sup>21</sup> It seems to me that through this silent space, the artist relates to her real self. The 'true self' may be viewed in the light of what Woolf means by 'reality':

...It lights up in a room...It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech...Whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent...Now, the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. (ROO)<sup>22</sup>

She describes 'reality' as something abstract, in which she 'shall continue to exist', it is 'that which she seeks' (Diary III, 10 September 1928, 196). 'Reality' in Woolf's world, has no form or name in the world and can only be experienced in solitude, it overcomes the horizons of space and time (Hussey 1986, 35). Her notion of 'reality' seems to imply that there is an autonomous self which can perceive this spiritual presence, this 'reality' behind appearances, and which can be distinguished from 'identity'.

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<sup>20</sup> Virginia Woolf: *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958, repr. 1975) 191

<sup>21</sup> From an interview by Susan Husserl- Kapit in *Signs*, Winter 1975. In Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtviron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) 175

<sup>22</sup> Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928) 165,166. For whole excerpt, see: *Silence speaks*.

The self in *The Waves* is often symbolized in the form of a *stone* or a *crystal* (von Frantz 1969, 208). Symbolically, crystals have been considered as containers of life forces, and the stone is an ancient image for the self with associations of wholeness. In *The Waves*, Susan ‘with eyes like lumps of crystal’, longs for this wholeness in herself, which the stone in her side has deprived her from. She had to wrap up her agony and screw it tight into a ball which became the stone in her side. She also refers to the stone in the opening scene of the book: ‘I see a slab of pale yellow’ (TW, 5). To Neville, the image of the stone alludes to infinity: ‘What infinite time is before us...buying perhaps a fountain pen because it is green, or asking how much is the ring with the blue stone?’

Infinity is symbolized in the *circle-ring-cluster*. The *circle* is man’s attempt to visualize the infinite and impose a form on the endless space of our universe. Bernard’s first image, a ring that quivers in a loop of light, suggests this endless infinity which radiates out into silence, ‘like a great ring of pure and endless light’. The phrase ‘the being grows rings’ which is used several times throughout the novel, alludes to this symbol. Miss Lambert’s ring symbolizes the ring of light and love: ‘The purple light’, said Rhoda, ‘in Miss Lambert’s ring...it is an amorous light’ (TW, 23).

The image of the ‘steel ring’ which Louis searches for, is the pattern, the hidden order, ‘a steel ring of clear poetry’: ‘I shall assemble a few words and forge round as a hammered ring of beaten steel’ (TW, 128). The image is intensified in its concentrated consonant form. The ring exists beyond space and time, beyond the individual (MOB, Introduction, 22). The emphasis on the change and continuity of personal identity applies only to the self that inhabits the finite world of physical and social existence. This is the world which Bernard inhabits when he speaks about his love for phrasemaking and his dependence on other people. His feeling of his self is depending on his ability to use language: ‘When I cannot see words curling like rings of smoke around me I am in darkness-I am nothing’ (TW, 99). During real *moments of being*, this self is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes part of a greater whole. As the actual moment of communion approaches, the lights seem to become richer for Rhoda, and she feels that eyes can push through substances. Jinny feels that their senses have been stretched into floating webs, and Louis hears the disparate noises around them run together into one ‘steel blue circular sound’.

‘Now, once more’, said Louis, ‘as we are about to part...the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring. Something is made. Yes, as we rise and fidget, a little nervously, we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling... that globes itself here, among these lights...Hold it forever! (TW, 109). This common feeling

which Louis refers to, is symbolized by the ring. This ring breaks ever so often when the individuals move in different directions. But the ‘thing’ which has importance is the thing they make together, a greater whole.

‘But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through another’, says Bernard (TW.108). This is the ring that forms one side of Bernard’s dual character, his phrasemaking habit, leading to the motif of the self: ‘But how describe the world without a self? There are no words’ (TW, p. 221). Bernard’s image of the dew drops on the spider web shifts our attention from the abstract rings to the actuality of the fragile water drop, which links the image of the drop with the ring; the drop that falls into the ring of light. This image forms the other part of his character. It becomes the motif of silence, which will be developed in the next chapter: ‘And silence falls, drop upon drop into the ring of light’. The circular rhythm of life is also symbolized by the image of the ring within the ring: ‘Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday, Tuesday. Each spreads the same ripple. The being grows *rings* like a tree. Like a tree, leaves fall (TW, 217).

The image of the circle has the capacity to contract and expand. Susan’s caterpillar which can curl itself up, can be seen in the contracted, concentrated image of the chrysalis. Virginia Woolf uses this image to illustrate the nature of the mind, as she experiences her mind ‘shutting itself up’:

‘I believe these illnesses are in my case-how shall I express it? – partly mystical. Something happens in my mind. It refuses to go on registering impressions. It shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis. I lie quite torpid, often with acute physical pain...suddenly something springs... (6 February 1930)

In *The Waves*, the mind itself is also symbolized by the ring, as Woolf uses the ring image to symbolize the mind: ‘The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth. Opening and shutting, shutting and opening, with an increasing hum and sturdiness, the haste and fever of youth are drawn into service until the whole being seems to expand in and out like the mainspring of a clock’ (TW, 198).

In the whole context of the novel, the *wave* has a number of symbolic roles. As contrast to the *globe* symbolizing the conscious aspect of man, the *waves* can be seen as representing man’s interchange between the conscious and the unconscious. Images of waves flow through the whole novel, they gather up and show forth all that which is mysterious in human life. They pervade the souls of the separate characters as well as providing atmosphere. And they symbolize the endless flux of life, the wheel of existence which rolls on forever.

‘The wave in the mind’, says Jack Stewart, ‘is a metaphor for the unconscious elements rising to the surface and for undifferentiated sensation building into form’. The metaphor of

the breaking wave suggests that ‘words dispel the vision; yet through their rhythmic and sensory associations words may retain, or reactivate, non-verbal qualities of the creative unconscious from which they spring.’ The wavelike rhythm of the soliloquies ‘running in the rhythm of the waves’, carries the reader into a poetic mood, which Stewart places ‘beyond fiction’, into the realm of ‘silence’ (Stewart 1972, 436).

The wave and the sea are symbols of life and reality. Just as ripples rise out of the sea, grow into separate waves which they break and become part of the sea again, so human beings are born as different individuals, passing through childhood, youth and old age. Then they rest in reality and continue to live in the spirit realm. The first draft of the transcribed *holographs*, reveals that the waves were also meant to represent children, arising from the maternal sea, representing the collective unconscious:

Many mothers, & before them many mothers, & again many mothers, have groaned, & fallen  
Like one wave, succeeding another. Wave after wave, endlessly sinking & falling as far as the eye  
can stretch. (Draft 1, 7)

Many children were like waves succeeding waves, endlessly sinking & sinking & falling, & lying  
prostrate, & each holding up, as the wave pass its crest, (innumerable children)...a child.  
(Draft 1, 9)

The rhythm of the waves change in tempo, like a sleeper it slumbers symbolizing the unconscious: The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. (Interlude 1) To Louis it symbolizes the rhythmic flow of life, the protection of ordinary life which he seeks. Feeling unprotected, Rhoda also seeks the wave of protection (TW, p. 79). In life, we may sink into an unconscious state of mind. The sea is an image of this collective unconscious. As Rhoda says we might ‘sink down, deep into what passes, this omnipresent, general life’(TW, p.84). ‘We may sink and settle on the waves’, she says (TW, p.158). The sea symbolizes here the fluid yet unchanging life of the soul, which ‘reaches the crest and then falls back’.

Jinny goes with the wave with all her bodily experience, and she wants to be carried and embraced by it: ‘We yield to this slow flood...In and out, we are swept now within the large figure’ (TW, 76,77). Susan’s waves represent her children: ‘My children will carry me on...like the waves of the sea under me (TW, 99). Her children represent her unconscious.

Rhoda feels that she is ‘cast up and down among man and women, like a cork on a rough sea’. With intermittent shocks, sudden as the springs of the tiger, life emerges heaving its dark crests from the sea. It is a shock-like wave that rises in her, and affects her whole being. She

is flung on top of the waves, becoming the foam which expands the wave: 'I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rocks with whiteness' (TW, 80).

In the diary entry headed: 'A State of Mind' (15 September 1926), the author tells about the shock-like waves rising in her:

Woke up perhaps at 3. Oh, it's beginning, it's coming-the horror-physically like a painful wave swelling about the heart tossing me up. I'm unhappy, unhappy. Dear? God, I wish I were dead. Pause. But why am I feeling this? Let me watch the wave rise. I watch. Vanessa. Children. Failure. Yes; I detect that. Failure.Failure. (The wave rises) (Diary III, 110)

This experience can be very dramatic: 'Wave crashes. I wish I were dead!...The wave again.' To me, Rhoda's feeling of being cast up and down, like a cork on the sea, seems to be a metaphor for the author's shock-like and wavelike experiences.

The most dynamic wave in the novel is the wave that rises in Bernard as a force which moves him onwards. He surges from the sea of existence:

And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like a proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls back'. (TW, 228)

The wave expands, the tempo rises to a climax as he flings himself with it: 'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding...' (TW, 228) 'As human beings we toss a mane of white spray; we pound on the shore; we are not to be confined', says Bernard. The image of the horse which is present in these speeches by Bernard, represents a similar climactic moment in the author's life:

Then comes the terror, the exultation; the power to rush out unnoticed, alone, to be consumed, to be swept away to become a rider on the random wind; the tossing wind; the trampling and neighing wind; the horse with the blown-back mane; the tumbling, the foraging; he who gallops *for-ever*, nowhither travelling, indifferent; to be part of the eyeless dark, to be rippling and streaming, to feel the glory run molten up the spine, down the limbs, making the eyes glow, burning, bright, and penetrate the buffeting waves of the wind' (Collected Essays 1966-7, 296).

The wish *to be consumed* echoes Rhoda's mind, *the eyeless dark*, Louis, and the *rippling, streaming and burning* quality, Jinny. The characters were a part of Virginia Woolf.

In this chapter we have seen how the author, through the use of metaphor, presents the essential qualities of her characters. *Inner conflicts* are communicated in a concentrated form through metaphor: Louis' fear ties him to the past by '*the beast that stamps, and stamps, and stamps*'. Rhoda's life emerges 'heaving its crests from the sea, sudden *as the springs of a tiger*'. The experience of having no face is captured in the simile: 'mooning, vacant, completed like those white petals she used to swim in the bowl'. Susan's feeling of herself is

bound to nature: I *am* the seasons, I *am* the field, I *am* the trees', and her suppression is symbolized by the handkerchief 'screwed up in a tight ball'. Bernard's dependence of words bubbles 'like rings of smoke'.

The characters have also been created from images which have arisen out of *rhythm* and the notion of *contraction and expansion*, the two principles of life to which we referred at the end of chapter two. We see this in the way Jinny rises 'out of this sun into the shadow'. The burning spot on the horizon becomes internalized in the character. The surface and sensations of the body are the character's main focus. Louis is rooted with his body down to the middle of the earth, he goes 'beneath the ground carrying a lamp from cell to cell'. His mind expands and is stretched out in time, before it even existed. Rhoda's life 'flings out' and expands like the foam that 'sweeps and fills the uttermost rocks with whiteness'. When Bernard is most disparate, he is most integrated. His expansive consciousness which includes all the other characters, assimilates the others into his body: on his brow is the blow that Percival got when his horse fell, on his neck is the kiss that Jinny gave Louis, and his eyes fill with Susan's tears. Images of sun, moon and earth are represented in the characters of Jinny, Rhoda and Susan.

The author was more concerned with lives together than with a single life, and I have suggested that the characters were supposed to be 'one'. Furthermore, I have illustrated how the seven-sided flower represents the merging of separate selves and how the image of Percival's search for the Holy Grail represents the soul's search for inner wholeness. The characters are transformed by symbols, to which they relate in various ways. The globe as sphere represents inner wholeness, and in the steel ring of clear poetry, there is a hidden order which exists beyond space and time, beyond the individual. The stone or crystal represents the soul's search for the true self. Bernard's struggle to overcome his ego and unite with the true self is representative for the artist's search for her true spiritual self.

The metaphors which shape the characters as individuals are condensed images, whereas the images which I refer to as symbols for their common consciousness and spiritual growth are more expansive. The characters relate to a globe which is a symbol that extends and expands throughout the book. Each character builds up the image of the earth as a concentrated image which expands into the universe, a world in which we all are related. Louis represents the centre of the earth: 'roots that went down to the middle of the earth' (TW,7). Jinny forms the surface of the earth: 'dancing febrile, hot over dry earth' (TW, 87) Susan represents the vegetative growth of the earth with its seasons: 'I am the field. I am the trees. I am the seasons'. Rhoda moves on the stormy sea: 'I am the foam that races over the



beach ' (TW, 98). Neville looks up to the sky: 'I look up, through the trees, into the sky'(TW, 27) and further on into infinity,<sup>23</sup> which then relates to the peripheral Percival: 'Loneliness and silence often surrounded him'(TW, 114). Percival, through his silent peripheral presence emerges as the novels 'central experience'.

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<sup>23</sup> Thus we spin round us infinitely fine filaments and construct a system (TW, 136)

## Chapter 4: Poetry and silence

### Poetry speaks: The Interludes

In this chapter we will turn our attention from the inner life of the characters to the atmosphere which simultaneously foreshadows and envelops their lives. I will explore the meeting of sound and image in the poetry of the interludes, and I will illustrate the process which lies behind the creation of metaphor and metonymy. Images will be viewed in the light of the characters in the episodes, but the main emphasis will be on the poetic atmosphere related to nature, the sun and the sea, light and water. I will also relate the mystical aspect of the novel to Woolf's notion of 'reality'. Bernard's longing for the spirit will be linked to his need to overcome his ego and to communicate true spirituality.

'The interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge & also to give a background – the sea; insensitive nature', Virginia Woolf says in her diary (Diary III, 26 January 1930, 285). Having completed *The Waves* she was filled with a sense of relief and triumph. She had netted that 'fin in a waste of water' which appeared to her over the marshes out of her window at Rodmell when she was coming to an end of *To the Lighthouse*, and she says:

What interested me in the last stage was the freedom and boldness with which my imagination picked up, used and tossed aside all the images, symbols which I had prepared. I am sure that this is the right way of using them- not in set pieces, but simply as images, never making them work out; only suggest. Thus I hope to have kept the sound of the sea and the birds, dawn and garden subconsciously present, doing their work under ground. (Diary VI, 7 February 1931, 10)

The interludes represent the most poetic parts of the novel, and they are unique in themselves. Like impressionist paintings of Monet, they represent an attempt to capture the moment when it is broken by light. They have their own descriptive style, and yet they provide the novel with that essential poetry which greatly contributes to its aesthetic value.

The interludes follow the sun's position in the sky during the day, from early morning to late evening. They also follow the seasons, from spring to winter, although this seasonal cycle is not as obvious as the passing of the day, until in the last interlude: 'the tree shook its branches and a scattering of leaves fell to the ground.' The progress of the seasons parallels the characters' development towards old age. The progress of the day is enclosed in the progress of the seasonal cycle, and the seasonal cycle is enclosed in the progress of the life cycle.

Images of *waves, sun, birds, trees* and *garden* are symbols which run through the interludes and foreshadow the physical and psychological state of the characters. The *sun* sets

the time frame, as the story unfolds itself from sunrise to sunset in the interludes, and from childhood until old age in the episodes. But the sun is also a symbol for the spirit, as in the fifth interlude. With the death of Percival, the sun forces become particularly active being at its zenith point. We are aware of an intense presence. This burning hot atmosphere is contrasted in the last interlude, where light, colour and life are extinguished.

The sun and the sea seem at first inseparable. The canvas of a poetic painting is gradually filled out. We notice how the brush smoothly fills out the canvas, illustrated by the lack of commas in the text. The painter sweeps her brush as the waves move rhythmically, one after another, in rhythmic sequences. The 'listening' reader becomes aware of the rhythm of the waves.

*First interlude:*

The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay in the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after the other, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.

As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The waves paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. (TW,3)

What is characteristic of this interlude is the transparent effect which is being created by the imagery of light and water. The rhythm of the wave continues in a rhythmic flow of language. The 'sigh' of the thin veil of white water leaves a lucid, transparent image on the sand. The metaphor of a woman holding a lamp and raising her hand is used as metaphor for the ascent of the sun from below the horizon. Gradually, as the 'painted' picture develops, the division between sea and sky becomes clearer as the sky lights up:

...as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the *blades of a fan*. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface *flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres* like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire.' (ibid, my italics)

The image of burning fire is characterized through sound and colour. The 'fire-sound' *f* lets the flickering flame dance, and the *b* in the burning bonfire intensifies the fire-image which then culminates in the beautiful combination in the two sounds in *blades of a fan*, *broad flame* and *fire burnt*. The red flaming image of Jinny inevitably relates to the image of Jinny in the episodes. In this interlude she is reflected in the atmosphere of nature, whereas in the episodes this mood is internalised in her soul through her fiery, flaming desires.

The colours spread out in the synecdoche: *blades of a fan*. The *blade* alludes to the images of *leaf* and *knife*. There is similarity between *blade* and *fan*, in which blade is the part signifying the wholeness of 'fan'. The image of the *fan* is also a metaphor for the movement made by the woman, who sweeps her hand across the sky and lightens it up with her lamp. This image widens out at the end, when the light of the sun makes the leaves transparent, one after the other. The leaf image has grown organically out of the previous metaphor; the blades of a fan. Leaf and blade are contiguous and are therefore related by metonymy:

The light struck upon the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then another. One bird chirped high up; there was a pause. The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue finger-print under the leaf by the bedroom window, The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside.(ibid.)

In the *second interlude*, the sun and water transform the object, and everything diffuses. Something green becomes *lumps of emerald*, a bud splits asunder and everything becomes softly amorphous. The plate *flows*, and the *steel* of the knife becomes liquid, by the use of the *l* sound. The transparency of the thin veil of water in the first interlude makes the objects transparent, and the liquidness is beautifully captured in the 'watery' *l*-sound which has the flowing quality: *lump, emerald, softly, 'plate flowed', 'steel of knife were liquid.'* Then the *l* in the stronger waves falling on the shore sounds deeper, they break as *logs falling*. The flowing sounds describing the watery and light quality of the objects symbolize the flow of language that Woolf aims at in her poetic technique.

In the *fourth interlude* the human element is related to the animal image of 'horse' in metaphors and similes. Here the language is more closely related to *narrative prose* than lyric prose, illustrated by the strong guttural sounds of *k, ng*, and the *h*. The *muscularity of an engine* moulds its way through the sentence:

The waves... fell with the *concussion of horses' hooves* on the turf.  
Their spray rose like the *tossing of lances and assegais over the riders' heads*.  
They swept the beach with steel blue diamond tipped water.  
They drew in and out with energy, *the muscularity of an engine* which sweeps its force out and in again...(TW,8, my italics)

The *horses' hooves* are contiguous with other horse imagery like *lances and assegais, riders' heads*. The horses' hooves, however, have another metaphoric meaning: they allude to Louis' fear and 'the beast that stamps and stamps'. The *concussion of horses' hooves* is a metaphor where horses' hooves are compared to the concussion of waves. The steel blue diamond tipped water alludes to Louis' steel blue poetry, which implies that these lines are an attempt

to create 'eternal' poetry. In other words these metaphors are related to each other in many different ways, both by metonymy: *horses' hooves, lances and assegais, riders' heads*, and metaphorically. The metaphor 'like the tossing of lances and assegais over the riders' heads' is related metaphorically and symbolically to Percival as a knight riding on his horse, inspiring poetry.

The hills curved and controlled, seemed bound back by thongs, as a limb is laced by muscles; and the woods which bristled proudly on their flanks were like the curt, clipped mane on the neck of a horse. (ibid.)

The metaphor 'like the curt, clipped mane on the neck of a horse' relates nature to Percival. Nature is animated through personification: *woods bristle proudly*. The birds are 'ensouled' as they sing with *passion*: 'they sang *as if the song were urged out of them* by the pressure of the morning.'

The most poetic passage in this interlude alludes to Susan's experience. The snake-like s-sound characterises her jealousy, the s moves the lines with their images of *snails*, murmuring *shell* on the beach, the *stone* that has formed in her side and the *crack* which has been left in her soul. The *sh*-sound can be heard in the sea and particularly in the shell. The symbols here grow out of the alliteration. Again, image and sound merge into each other. The birds swing and swoop in a dynamic movement:

They *swooped suddenly* from the lilac bough or the fence. They *spied* a *snail* and tapped the *shell* against a *stone*. They tapped furiously, methodically until a shell broke and something *slimy* oozed from the crack. They *swept* and *soared sharply* in flights high into the air, twittering *short, sharp* notes.(TW,82)

This enlivened atmosphere becomes more intense in the *fifth interlude* leading up to the death of Percival. This part represents the climax of the novel. The sun being at its zenith point, now acts out its utmost potential force. Everything burns:

Now the *sun burnt uncompromising*, undeniable. It struck upon the hard sand, and the rocks became furnaces of red heat...It gave to everything its exact measure of colour; to the sand hills their innumerable glitter... It lit up the smooth gilt mosque, the frail pink-and white card houses of the southern village, and the long-breasted, white-haired women who knelt in the river bed beating wrinkled cloths upon stones. ...*At midday the heat of the sun made the hills grey as if shaved and singed in an explosion*, while further north, in cloudier and rainier countries, hills smoothed into slabs as with the back of a spade had a light in them as if a warder, *deep within, went from chamber to chamber carrying a green lamp*.(TW, 111, my italics)

The flowing element has vanished; everything has become *dry* and *hard*, as in the desert. This atmosphere is internalised in the image of Louis, carrying the green lamp as a warder walking in the death chambers in Egypt. The colour of green is complimentary to the colour of red in

the first interlude, which lightens up the sky in the periphery. The image of the chamber forms a contrast of darkness.

This darkness leads us to the dark mood of the last *dramatic interlude*:

The trees shook its branches and a scattering of leaves fell to the ground... Black and grey were shot into the garden from the broken vessel that had once held red light. *Dark shadows blackened the tunnels between the stalks.* The thrush was silent and the worm sucked itself back into its narrow hole. Now and again a whitened and hollow straw was blown from an old nest and fell into the dark grasses among the *rotten apples*. The light had faded from the tool-house wall and the adder's skin hung from the nail empty... The substance had gone from the solidity of the hills...there was no sound save the cry of a bird seeking some *lonelier tree*...(TW,181, my italics)

The tone in this interlude is altogether *dramatic*. It has even the character of tragedy expressed as atmosphere. The atmosphere is dark and grey, and there is no colour or light. The image of the apple tree is a symbol of death, and darkness rolls on its waves, covering everything.

This image reflects the same mood as the author describes in *A Sketch of the Past*, where she reflects on the death of her own step-sister Stella and on the agony which her husband experienced: 'And the tree, outside in the dark garden, was to me an emblem, a symbol, of the skeleton agony to which her death had reduced him; and us; everything' (MOB, 121). The leafless tree was a very painful element in their life, she says. But 'trees don't remain leafless. They begin to have little red chill buds'.

The expansive illuminating image in the first interlude finds its sharp contrast in this still point, where no sound is heard, only the waves 'breathing out' in a rather heavy 'sigh' all life. But the novel does not end with this mood. The life stream continues in Bernard's voice. Trees do not remain leafless.

### **The silent world**

While working on *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf found herself surrounded by silence. She describes this silence as a kind of inner loneliness, -'interesting to analyze if one could'. (Diary III, 11 October 1929, 259,260). While walking up Bedford Place one October afternoon, she is reminded of the death of her brother Thoby:

How I suffer. And no one knows how I suffer, walking up this street, engaged in my anguish, as I was after Thoby died - alone; fighting something alone. But then I had the devil to fight, and now nothing. And when I come indoors *it is all so silent*...If I never felt these extraordinary pervasive strains - of unrest, or rest, or happiness, or discomfort - I should float down into acquiescence. Here is something to fight: & when I wake early I say to myself, Fight, fight. If I could catch the

feeling, I would: the feeling of *the singing of the real world*, as one is driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world... (ibid., my italics)

The author describes the inner tranquillity she felt after having completed the novel:

I have been sitting these 15 minutes in a state of glory, & calm, & some tears, thinking of Thoby & if I could write Julian Thoby Stephen 1881-1906 on the first page. I suppose not. How physical the sense of triumph and relief is! (Diary IV, 7 February 1931, 10)

The diary reveals that Virginia Woolf considered *The Waves* to be her most mystical book in which she had to come to terms with her mystical feelings (AWD, 137). From her diary we know that she had in fact as early as in the autumn of 1926 had the idea about writing a novel about ‘something mystic, spiritual, the thing that exists when we aren’t there’.<sup>24</sup> She described ‘the fin in the waste of water’ that appeared to her at Rodmell:

I wished to add some remark to this, on the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the *universe* that one is left with. It is this that is frightening and exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is. One sees a *fin* passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean? Really there is none, I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is, soberly and accurately, the oddest affair; has in it the *essence of reality*. (Diary III, 30 September, 1926, 113, my italics)

The sense of something mysterious and only *partially seen* moving within a larger entity, occurs in Virginia Woolf’s letter to Gerald Brenan in 1922, where she discusses new movements in the cultural life:

‘The human soul, it seems to me, orientates itself afresh every now and then. It is doing so now. No one can see it whole, therefore. The best of us catch a *glimpse* of a *nose*, a *shoulder*, something turning away, *always in movement*.’  
(Letters II, 1976, 568, my italics)

In her diary (10 September 1928) she described the meaning of her vision as ‘a consciousness of reality’, a thing she sees before her, something abstract residing in the downs or sky, beside which nothing matters, in which she shall rest and continue to exist. Furthermore, she adds that this is the most important thing to her, this is what she seeks (Diary III, 195, 196). These entries from her most intimate writing are the result of illumination, ‘of matches struck in darkness’, to use the author’s expression. They are the outcome of Woolf’s intense moments experienced in a ‘sanctuary’ during her ‘religious retreat’ at Monk’s House. She describes *reality* as something abstract. Life has in it the essence of reality. In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) she reflects on this reality:

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<sup>24</sup> From excerpt quoted in Quentin Bell. *Virginia Woolf, A Biography* (London: Grafton Books, 1987) 112

What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem something very erratic, very undependable- now to be found on a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. *It lights up a group in a room* and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and *makes the silent world more real than the world of speech*- and there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, *it fixes and makes permanent*. That is what is remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. (*A Room of One's Own*, 165-66, my italics)

The author describes the silent world as being more real than the world of speech. This motif is developed in Bernard's life. Like Louis, he seeks 'the protective waves of the ordinary', which is related to his habit of phrasemaking. On the other hand, there is his interest in 'silence...the things people don't say', the existence lying *beyond* the limits of language. To Bernard, 'silence forms on the roof of the mind and falls back into pools beneath' (*The Waves*, 172).

'And time', said Bernard, 'lets fall its drop. The drop that has formed on the roof of the soul falls. On the roof of my mind, time, forming, lets fall its drop. Last week as I stood shaving, the drop fell. I, standing with my razor in my hand, became suddenly aware of the merely habitual nature of my action (this is the drop forming) and congratulated my hands, ironically, for keeping at it. Shave, shave, shave, I said Go on shaving. The drop fell. (TW, 141)

Bernard describes the drop falling as *time* tapering to a point, as a sunny pasture covered with a dancing light, 'widespread as a field at midday, which becomes pendant. Time *falls* as a drop. Events are not ordered as a sequence in time, they 'fall' on the roof of the mind. From this viewpoint is inferred that events occur in our minds. Bernard learns to listen to the silent world. He becomes less dependent on other people, as he finds the still point in himself. Towards the end of the novel, leaning on a parapet in Rome, he reflects on the nature of visual impressions, which have to be turned into words by the artist:

These moments of escape are not to be despised...Leaning on a parapet I see far out a waste of water. A fin *turns*. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus brief statements that we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words. (TW, 145, my italics)

Already as a young man Bernard is aware of his need for silence and solitude. The death of Percival which coincides with the birth of his son, impels in him an intense feeling and a need to be alone:

My son is born; Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know, only that I need silence, and to be alone and to go out, and to save one hour to consider what happened to my world, what death has done to my world. (TW, 117)



His awareness of Percival's present spirit, of the essence of reality which surpasses time and continues to exist, raises in him the question of communication with the dead: 'What form will our communication take? You have gone across the court, further and further, drawing finer and finer threads between us. But you exist somewhere' (ibid.). The mysterious illumination symbolized by the 'six-sided flower made of six lives' is described in the Hampton Court scene, where all the characters come together. Bernard hears silence fall:

'Silence falls; silence falls'; said Bernard. 'But now listen; tick, tick; hoot; hoot; the world has hailed us back to it. I heard for one moment the howling winds of darkness pass *beyond life*. Then tick, tick (the clock); then hoot, hoot (the cars). We are landed; we are on shore; we are sitting, six of us, at a table. It is the memory of my nose that recalls me. I rise; "Fight", I cry, "fight!", remembering the shape of my own nose...' (TW, 173)

This passage echoes the diary excerpt dated 11 October 1929, referred to in the beginning of this chapter, where Virginia Woolf herself felt this silence, which to her was related to an inner struggle: "when I wake early I say to myself, Fight, fight."

Not only Bernard speaks of his illumination, his transcendent state of mind. 'We have triumphed over the abysses of space', says Jinny. 'The still mood is on us', Rhoda continues, 'and we enjoy this momentary alleviation when the walls of the mind become transparent.' 'A mysterious illumination', said Louis. 'Built up with much pain, many strokes', said Jinny... And Neville, taking Jinny's hand by the still moonlit water cries, 'Love, love', and she answers, 'Love, love? What song do we hear?' Being together at Percival's urn, their souls transcend, and their minds listen together: 'all seems alive' (TW, 177). Percival's physical absence is felt as spiritual presence in the minds of the others. He represents this inner wholeness, as his existence connects the dead with the living, the universal with the personal.

During the last episode, Bernard seems to develop a transparency of self where a space in his mind is cleared (TW, 217). 'As silence falls I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another', he says. His ego is destroyed as he becomes aware of his real self. From feeling at one with the others, he reaches a transcendent moment of renewal. But in order to reach that stage of consciousness which is a kind of initiation, his soul goes through a dark tunnel: This darkness of the soul is illustrated by the metaphor of the eclipse in cosmos:

The self, Bernard: I spoke to that self ... the man who has been some mysteriously and with sudden accretions ... banged his spoon on the table, 'I will consent'..  
Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me... It was like the eclipse when the sun went out.. winter ... a man without a self...

silence. The sky is dark as polished whalebone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or of dawn. Dawn to an old person, renewal and awakening. (TW, 218, 219)

He goes on to describe his mystical experience which transcends both time and space:

Now tonight, my body rises tier upon tier like some cool temple whose floor is strewn with carpets and murmurs rise and the altars stand smoking; but above, here in my serene head, come only fine gusts of melody, waves of incense, while the lost dove wails. And the banners tremble above tombs, and the dark airs of midnight shake trees outside the open windows. When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread! ...I could worship my hand even, with its fan of bones laced by blue mysterious veins and its astonishing look of aptness, suppleness and ability to curl softly or suddenly crush- its infinite sensibility. (TW, 223)

In his transcendent, almost translucent state of mind, Bernard is able to watch himself from a distance. He begins to look through the veil of his previous illusions and aspires to silence and solitude, taking upon him 'the mystery of things' (TW, 224). Bernard seeks the silence of Being, the 'ring of light', which characterizes a true poet. The 'veil of being' represented by too many words with their 'rings of smoke', prevented him from finding the true ring of being. He has done with phrases, he has thrown off the veil and he sings his 'song of glory'. Like a star in the sky he feels at one with the universe and seeks to unite with his true self:

Let me now raise my song of glory. Heaven be praised for solitude. Let me be alone. Let me cast and throw away this veil of being, this cloud that changes with the last breath, night and day, and all night and all day. While I sat here *I have been changing*. I have watched the sky change. I have seen clouds cover the stars, then free the stars, then cover the stars again...Now no one sees me and *I change no more*. (TW, 226, my italics).

Bernard is led beyond his personal life and acquires something that extends beyond his ego. He delights at the starry heaven because he lives in his own inner being. Movement and change reach stillness and rest:

How much better is silence; the coffee-cup, the table. How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here forever with bare things, this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself. (TW, 227)

Is existence Becoming, or is it Being? Life may be seen as a unity of these two principles, if we look at the stillness of death being intimately related to, and even interwoven with, the movement of life. At the end of the novel Bernard achieves a moment of expansion. As the wave rises in him, he surges up from the sea of existence. Bernard is like a wave rising from and uniting with, mystically, 'mother sea'. The movement between life and death is portrayed as a huge wave rising. The intensity as the wave lifts itself reaches its climax through an inner

struggle of confronting death: 'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquishing and unyielding, O Death! The waves broke on the shore' (TW, 228)<sup>25</sup>

In the ego a battle takes place between life and death. Thus the novel concludes with a presentation of a *fighting spirit*. There is, in a sense, a contest between life and death, which reaches out from individuality into infinity. It implies more than it can say, because it reaches into the depths of the mysteries of life.

In this chapter I have illustrated how *The Interludes* provide a frame for *The Episodes* as they depict the progress of one day from sunrise to sunset, which parallels the life of the characters from early childhood towards old age and death. I have illustrated how poetic prose is made transparent through the meeting of sound and image. Furthermore, I have differentiated between metaphor and metonymy in the poetic prose. In *The Interludes* the language, which is characterized by metonymy and contiguity, is influenced by dramatic prose, whereas the language which is rich in metaphor and similarity is distinguished as poetry. The first *Interludes* are particularly poetic with translucent and fluid impressions, and objects are transformed by the forces of sun and the sea through sound. When the motif of death emerges in the last *Interlude*, the poetic prose becomes more dramatic. It is characterized by the image of the naked tree as a silhouette against the sky.

While working on *The Waves* Woolf felt that she was surrounded by silence, and she explored a consciousness of 'reality', which she considered as something abstract in which man shall 'rest and continue to exist'. This presence which 'lights up a group in a room' makes the silent world more real than the world of speech. Percival's physical absence is felt as spiritual presence in the minds of the others. He represents inner wholeness, and his existence connects the dead with the living. Bernard learns to listen to the silent world, and he seeks to develop a transparency of self where a space in his mind is cleared. He describes a mystical experience when his consciousness transcends time and space, and his ego dissolves as he becomes aware of his real self. He seeks the silence of 'being' and questions whether existence is 'being' or 'becoming', permanent or shifting. Concomitantly, he asks, or Woolf asks through him, whether personal identity is stable or unstable, being or becoming.

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<sup>25</sup> See Diary excerpt 11 October 1929. The author developed this idea : 'This is also to show that the theme effort, effort, dominated; not the waves, & personality, & defiance...the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion.' (Diary III,20 December 1930, 339)

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored narrative, dramatic and poetic aspects of *The Waves*. The main concern of this analysis has been to illustrate the influence of the three techniques on the discourse and their effect on the development of the novel's themes. My argument has focused on the Woolf's attempt 'to write to a rhythm and not to a plot'.

I have discussed the author's portrayal of narrators and the devices she uses to develop her stream of consciousness technique. The narrative voice and perspective are represented by various narrators, including the main narrator Bernard, the lady writing, the 'lonely mind' and the five characters: Jinny, Louis, Rhoda, Susan and Neville. Bernard enters the depth of thoughts and feelings of the other friends, keeps them all in his mind and communicates their inner life. The different narrators' shifts of perspectives contribute significantly to the novel's varied style, when the author lets her narrators dip into other characters or when they comment on the author's ideas about language.

The influence of *dramatic techniques* is evident in the way that events are organised as scenes in an episode. The concentrated and disciplined 'moulded blocks' of prose gives the speaker dramatic power. The *monologues'* lonely voice, vary between soliloquy and interior monologue. We have seen that the soliloquy has a stronger dramatic effect than the interior monologue since it projects the characters' thoughts and feelings out towards an audience as they come out into the light. The characters here speak out their experiences more explicitly than in interior monologue, where they are allowed to reflect and pause, in a more dreamy state of mind. My interpretation of 'moments in states of consciousness' has suggested that the 'moments of being' in the characters' lives are linked to the author's own life and that consciousness is able to move in space and time. Louis' consciousness expands the moment. Conversely, Jinny's 'moment of being' is purely physical. In Rhoda's transitory moment the mind is suspended, and the body static.

In *The Waves* rhythm, repetition and variation encourage us to read backwards and forwards, making us see connections which cumulatively build up 'that which is not the story itself'. It is these elements of the text which, in my view, build up the strength of the novel. The characters' inner conflicts are strengthened by the use of repetition, which contributes to the organising line of plot. The formal scenic arrangement serves as a substitute for the lack of time sequence, as each scene has its own unity and time, which is independent of a chronological sequence. Rhythm works on a deeper level than sentences and words. It gives an impression of an undercurrent, like the blood stream in an organism, and the rhythm of

contraction/expansion works like the breath. An expanded image or impression may expand or contract in a human experience, as when the 'foam of the wave' carries Rhoda's consciousness out of her own centre and she loses hold of life, or the 'sun' contracts in Jinny's 'burning desires'. The 'musical movements' of the speeches which evolve from novel's silent centre represented by Percival, give the reader a musical experience. The rhythm of soliloquy which projects the characters thought outwards breathes rhythmically with the introvert interior monologue.

Since essential features of the characters are given as metaphor, metaphor is used as a device for characterization. Leitmotifs reveal the characters' inner life: their conflicts of fear, longing, doubt, imprisonment, courage, insecurity and loneliness. Characters are also created from images which represent a centre-periphery consciousness. They may be rooted in the body, their thoughts may expand in time, or the soul may feel imprisoned by itself. They appear sometimes as infinite complex entities, with roots reaching far into the past and branches intermingling with the branches of other people. The characters appear as breathing organisms who, in my imagination, grow through their metaphors. We get the impression that they are inwardly alive not only through their struggles, but also through their efforts to change.

Their shared imagery weaves them together as one organism, and the symbols which light up their consciousness are significant in construing this oneness. The seven-folded flower symbolizes the merging of separate selves, and the image of Percival's search for the Holy Grail becomes an image for the soul's search for inner wholeness and for the true spiritual self. Bernard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda approach that wholeness of being represented by Percival. Their search for the true spirit is revealed in the symbols, which allude to the transformation of the self in various ways and therefore also to the transformation of plots. The effect of these symbols is to add an objective dimension to life, which relates *The Waves* to the author's idea that 'behind this real world there is hidden a pattern' and that all human beings are connected with this.

The image of the globe, a dominant symbol throughout the novel, contributes to the shaping of the characters, in the sense that the globe represents the earth as part of the universe. Louis represents the centre of the earth, Jinny the surface, Susan the earth's vegetative growth, Rhoda the sea, Neville the sky and infinity - with Bernard assimilating them all, listening to the silent 'periphery' represented by Percival, who at the same time marks the novel's centre. Bernard's consciousness is peripheral in the sense that he represents many people. He is at the same time the central character of the novel. Images of sun, moon

and earth are represented by Jinny, Rhoda and Susan. This aspect adds a universal dimension to the lives of 'our friends'.

The poetry in the beautifully translucent interludes enhances the novel's aesthetic originality and impact, provides it with an atmosphere which from the outside, influences the inner life of the characters. They permeate the novel in a purely poetic way, with their playful movements of light and shadow. The meeting of sound and image in the poetry has the effect of transforming objects by light and shadow, which gives the language a transparent quality. The bird song has an invigorating effect on the sometimes monotonous style of the monologues. Towards the end of the novel, the poetry of the interludes is influenced by dramatic prose. When light turns to darkness and death approaches, the dramatic style of the language 'sculpts' the image of the lonely tree. In this sense, the dramatic style contributes to establishing death as a motif. The wavelike rhythm of the soliloquies carries the reader into the sphere of poetry. The Interludes, stir the reader's imagination and enliven the work as a whole.

Woolf describes a spiritual presence 'which lights up a group in a room' as a consciousness of reality, a world beyond this life: a silent world which lies beyond the world of speech. Percival's physical absence is felt as spiritual presence, which has implications for Bernard's attempt to listen to this silent world by clearing a space in his mind, in which his consciousness is able to transcend time and space. He seeks to unite with his true self and questions whether existence is 'being' or 'becoming'. The true nature of the self is incapable of completion, and the novel ends with an ongoing spiritual conflict between the individual's meeting with death.

The 'essence of reality' which 'will continue to exist' was a question of deep concern for Woolf. She believed that the writer may experience this reality more strongly than the average person and that the writer's task is to find it and communicate it to others. The silence and spiritual presence she could perceive in the process of writing *The Waves* was *real*. Death was a part of her life, as well as her characters' lives in *The Waves*.

The main inner conflict in the novel is related to Bernard's conflict of identity. 'Who am I? Am I all of them?' It is the question the author asked herself while writing the novel, reflecting on how she would tell the *story* of her life, and she asked herself: 'Who am I? I'm so many things'.<sup>26</sup> She chose a narrator, a many-sided self not bound by his own ego, who was able to enter the minds of all the others and dip into the 'events'.

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<sup>26</sup> Notebook 20, 767 in *The Two Holograph Drafts*

Planning *The Waves*, Woolf referred to the book as *novel-poem* and *play-poem*. Throughout this thesis I have referred to it as *novel*. Critics have discussed whether it should be called a novel or a poem. Is it a novel? In *Granite and Rainbow* the author makes us aware that while the *novelist* must assimilate the qualities of poetry, he must also guard against the tendency of prose to dissolve into shapelessness under the pressure of the poetic impulse (GR, 143-44). In *The Waves* Bernard the narrator is described as *novelist*, which suggests that he is an instrument of the author as *novelist* of the *novel*. Let us assume that we agree that *The Waves* is a narrative, told in poetic prose involving events and characters and what the characters say and do. However, if a narrative has to be a *story*, the generic requirement of story becomes problematic regarding this book. 'I am not trying to tell a story, yet it might be done in that way', Woolf wrote in her diary while planning *The Waves*. As we have seen, *story* is generally referred to as a narrative of events arranged in a time sequence. Forster was aware that there was something else besides time, which could not be measured by minutes or hours, but by intensity. To narrate life in time required the use of new narrative techniques, and *The Waves* marked an important step towards achieving such a technique. If by 'events and conflicts' we mean 'inner events and conflicts', these are certainly narrated in *The Waves*. But these inner events are not arranged chronologically. However, the chronological development regarding the characters' maturing process from childhood to old age is supported metaphorically by the chronological development from sunrise to sunset.

Woolf herself was acutely aware of the problem of story. To her, scene making was a natural way of marking the past. She imagined a narrator who could call out any of the children 'at any moment' and build up 'by that person the mood, tell a story'. In *The Waves* she constructed from the inside outwards scenes which first described the *sensations* of the children, then something of their physical appearance. This is the reverse of the traditional method where the novelist first builds up a scene and then puts a person into it, complete with all details of physical appearance. For Woolf, the sequence of scenes and selected moments are ordered by their emotional relevance to one another rather than by their logical interrelation.

If we consider *The Waves* as a narrative of events, we must consider its plot. The story's main concern is the way plot is structured. While the story represents a chronologically ordered synopsis of events, plot is constituted by the narrative events and actions aimed at maximising an artistic and emotional *effect*. My understanding of plot in *The Waves* implies that the inner conflicts and struggles of the characters present the dynamic force within the narrative discourse. When we narrate life in time we have to consider our inner 'secret' life,

and somehow this has to be plotted. Although Woolf emphasized rhythm more than plot, plot is nevertheless an important ingredient in a narrative. In her attempt to narrate life in time, she chose to give the moment intensity. The moment, representing an event, could be infinitely extended or highly compressed. In our minds memories of our lives remain disconnected fragments or glimpses, and valuable moments become treasures hidden in our souls. Therefore we are not only living in time. We *are* time, as Poulet says, and time is ‘the very *essence* of our being’ (Poulet 1954,3). In a novel, plot is of a different nature than in a poetic work. Poetic devices such as rhythm, repetition and leitmotifs encourage us to read backwards and forwards. In *The Waves* plot does not always unfold the author’s line of intention as ‘that which makes us read forward’. Instead, repetitive and varied rhythms contribute to the reader’s musical experience of the book.

As novelist, Virginia Woolf showed the courage to free herself from the boundaries of the traditional ‘story’. In an unsigned typescript of *Between the Acts*, the author describes her experience of a spiritual presence in an empty room, and she made this comment:

This nameless spirit then, who is not ‘we’ nor ‘I’, nor the novelist either; for the novelist, all agree, must tell a story: and there are no stories for this spirit; this spirit is not concerned to follow lovers to the altar, nor to cut chapter from chapter, and write as novelists do ‘The End’ with a flourish; since there is no end; this being, to reduce to the shortest and simplest word...<sup>27</sup>

We see how *The Waves* has been shaped by narrative, poetic and dramatic devices. These impulses have been woven together as a true work of art, where the author had to consider the effects that each style would have on the whole. Each device has a purpose and is used to convey the motifs in different ways. Through the narrative, the novel is given its characteristic voice, composed by many narrators. The speakers of the soliloquies share with the audience their life experiences in a concentrated, coherent form, which has a dramatic effect. Character building is influenced by poetic devices such as the use of metaphor which suggests and opens up rather than confirms and closes. The result is that the reader is free to use his/her own imagination. To communicate the characters’s lonely feeling and the intense presence which the experience of death asks for, Woolf, as I have attempted to show, develops poetic devices which she integrates into the novel’s structure. The elliptic form of poetry embraces that which is not said, which lies and lives beyond language. But above all, it is the poetry of life, sound, colour and light which fills the imagination of the reader.

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<sup>27</sup> Note marked ‘silence’. Typescript with author’s corrections, unsigned, 2.April ’38-30 ’39 in *the Berg Collection*, cited in Mitchell A, Leaska, ed, *Pointz Hall* (New York: University Publications, 1983 ) 61,62.



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## Appendix

Handwritten manuscript pages from *The Two Holograph Drafts of The Waves*. In: *The moths? or the life of anybody; life in general or Moments of being or The Waves*. Holograph, unsigned, dated July, 1929 – July, 1931 and: *The Waves*. Holograph notes, unsigned, dated June 15, 1930- Jan. 30, 1931. Filmed from the Holdings of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor Lenox, and Tilden Foundations with the permission of Quentin Bell.<sup>28</sup>

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Manuscript pages: Draft I: 1.17, 1.31. Draft II: 4.79, 6.75, 6.203.

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<sup>28</sup> Microfilm, Woodbridge, Ct.: Research Publications International, 1993.