

The Common Reader and the Modernist *Bildungsroman*:

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

In this dissertation I intervene in and challenge already-existing critical studies of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) that focus on ideas of imperialism, empire and subject-making practices in the novel by arguing for a revisionist reading of *The Waves* as a *Bildungsroman*. Unlike the *Bildungsroman* of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which utilised standard novelistic conventions to explore the relation between form and reality, I contend that *The Waves* is a thoroughly modernist reinvention of the *Bildungsroman* form designed to capture a rapidly industrialising and modernising English society. To capture the socio-political unrest in twentieth-century England at this time, Woolf deviates from the convention of a single-protagonist narration, using multiple perspectives to expose the contradictions in processes of self-formation, especially with regard to the relation between the self, nation and national identity. The correspondence between self, nation and national identity is explored through the silent seventh character, Percival, who I argue is characterised as a hero in the medieval romance tradition to expose the romantic and heroic fictional narratives that provided the framework for ideas of empire and imperialism, then at the core of nationhood and national identity in England. Conversely I argue that the character who narrates a third of the novel's narrative, Bernard, provides us with an alternative to empire and imperialism in subject-making practices. I argue that in the final section of *The Waves* Bernard deviates from the direct-speech narrative of preceding sections of the novel and engages the reader directly. The reader is thus alerted not only to his or her role as a reader, but also to Bernard's overarching role as primary protagonist in the novel. The reader has progressed alongside Bernard through the narrative in keeping with the genre designation of the *Bildungsroman* which encourages the progression of the reader alongside the progression of the primary protagonist. The reader is further encouraged in his or her progression by an aesthetic education present in the music and poetry that Woolf incorporates not only in the content, but in the very structure of the text. Two of the

novel's characters, Louis and Neville, use poetry to locate their subjectivities within larger historical narratives, while Beethoven's String Quartet No. 13 in B♭ major, *Opus 130*, informs the structure of the text, contributing to the interactive sonic and non-sonic landscape that actively invites the participation of the reader. The reader's participation in the novel is most fully realised when Bernard addresses the reader directly in the final section of *The Waves*. This interaction explains and thus concretises Woolf's overarching critiques of empire and imperialism in the novel alongside her proposed methods – which directly oppose the ideology of imperialism – for developing a subjectivity formed in relation to the common, and the individual experience of the common as a historically and materially determined phenomenon. The common in this sense is a community of 'common reading subjects', who like Woolf are not formally educated, but develop a subjectivity through reading premised on an equality of intelligence which enables them to engage critically with, order and make sense of the society and politics of their surrounding world. In this way, I show that Woolf challenges the already existing subject-making practices in twentieth-century England by exposing the contradictions – the exclusion of the marginalised, the poor and women – in ideas of Englishness. She proposes an alternative form of subject-making that is as diverse as her reading public and premised on a non-exclusionary acknowledgement of an equality of intelligence that defies class, gender and social boundaries.

Introduction: Virginia Woolf and the Modernist *Bildungsroman*

According to Virginia Woolf, the novelist, unlike the musician who practises in solitude or the painter in a studio, is at the mercy of the world and its meanings, “with a sense that he is being stimulated and played upon by the subject-matter of his art.”¹ In doing so the novelist captures the impressions and sensations that eventually become the unpolished material of fiction. To achieve the ‘polished’ material of fiction, the author must apply creativity to the ordering and structuring of raw material into the narrative, characterisation and plot of the novel, which is then released – as an ordered whole formed from the fragments of the everyday – to a reading public. This reading public that Woolf wrote for was comprised of ‘common readers’ who, like herself, were largely self-educated and read for pleasure rather than for scholarly pursuits like literary analysis. The ‘common reader’, in Woolf’s definition, read creatively by drawing on “rarest qualities of imagination, insight and judgement” because “literature is a very complex art.”² As the ‘common reader’ reads, he or she draws on an ability to create an ordered whole out of the disparate parts that make up a narrative, an ability to make meaning. Woolf describes the novel as a “ramshackle fabric”, comprised of “odds and ends” out of which the reader creates interpretations, and in this process experiences the text.³ The temporary satisfaction that is achieved through this process is thus because “to receive impressions with the utmost understanding, is only half the process of reading; it must be completed, if we are to get the whole pleasure from a book, by another.”⁴ The reader must organise and give shape to the fleeting impressions in a novel so as to form one impression

¹ Woolf, V., *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*. 4 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1967, p. 131

² Woolf, V., ‘How to Read a Book’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 205

³ Woolf, V., ‘The Common Reader’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p.11

⁴ Woolf, V., ‘How to Read a Book’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 203

“that is hard and lasting.”⁵ This hard and lasting impression can be achieved only when the novel has been read to completion and can therefore be interpreted and understood as the sum of its parts.

The author and the reader in this sense are two crucial participants in the interpretive process, the effort to make meaning. The author creatively orders the sensations and impressions of the everyday into a novel. The reader then imaginatively re-orders the sensations and impressions in the novel into a coherent whole. Woolf identifies, in her definition of the role that author and reader perform in constructing the novel, certain key interpretive skills – skills which she significantly marked as necessary not only in reading, but also in navigating material reality. Both reader and author, as Woolf defines them, perform in many ways the same tasks faced by the modern individual searching for order and meaning in a rapidly globalising and modernising society. The modern person, like the author, must be open to the sensations of the everyday and to a sense of self and of history in order to develop as a ‘whole,’ a particular type of subject in a changing world.

The connection between author and reader, modern individual and the surrounding world, converges most acutely in the novel genre of the *Bildungsroman*, whose focus on the relationship between the individual and society equips it to play a vital role in the ways that cultures imagine themselves, their pasts and their futures. The *Bildungsroman* in its classical eighteenth century form narrates the progress of an individual, usually male, from childhood to adulthood with a particular focus on his intellectual and moral development towards maturity and social integration. However, a revision of the genre would emerge in the twentieth century as a way to capture and make sense of a rapidly changing world.⁶ Jane Goldman notes that

⁵ Woolf, V., ‘How to Read a Book’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 203

⁶ Berman, M., *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 17

many of Woolf's novels can be "understood as experiments in the *Bildungsroman* [...] or in the *Künstlerroman*."⁷ Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915) is arguably both.

In *The Voyage Out*, the protagonist, Rachel Vinrace, is an aspiring musician who embarks on a literal journey to South America on her father's ship, which commences a figurative journey of self-discovery. The *Bildungsroman*, the novel of individual education and acculturation, in its ideal form, describes an individual's development from childhood to adulthood, an adulthood characterized by educational, emotional and intellectual maturity that facilitates a progressive process of self-perfection to a point of contentment and harmony, both individual and social. The acculturation of the individual is facilitated by a specific aesthetic education that "takes place with reference to a particularly privileged curriculum, works of art or, collectively, culture as canon."⁸ In other words, the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* encounters or seeks out specific artworks with moral or instructive value, and these artworks facilitate the protagonist's moral and social education. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's aesthetic education is facilitated by music, and more specifically the music of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, in particular the late sonatas, a body of music that I will return to in chapter two.

Music is central to Rachel's development of a sense of self – a self that is both musician and woman – as it develops in the novel. However, Rachel's aesthetic education in the novel is the only conventional aspect of the *Bildungsroman* genre that Woolf leaves intact. Woolf experiments with and disrupts the genre by toying with narrative. The novel is told from multiple perspectives rather than a single protagonist's narration. The characters in the novel observe more than they participate in public life. The internal monologues of the characters in *The Voyage Out*, especially the monologue of Rachel, who often meets moments of conflict and tension with silence, provide the reader with alternative interpretations of scenes outside

⁷ Goldman, J., *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 38

⁸ Berman, R., 'Modernism and the Bildungsroman', in: G. Bartram (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to The Modern German Novel*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 78

of mere description and dialogue. In this way, Woolf draws our attention to the binaries between the public life of action and the private imaginative life of the artist, making the differences visible, which enables Woolf to explore the formation of a subject in a distinctive manner. Furthermore, rather than reaching the close of her progression as a fully formed subject, Rachel's progression, unlike the progression of male characters in traditional *Bildungsromane*, begins with the promise of expansive possibility but gradually narrows until it ends in her death.

The binaries between public and private, the interiority and exteriority of characters, the self and its development, which interact with a changing world are themes that recur in all of Woolf's experiments with the *Bildungsroman* genre – themes that become more linguistically and thematically complex as her style develops. In *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf bars the protagonist almost entirely from his own progression by silencing him. The novel, set in pre-World War One England, follows the progress of Jacob Flanders from childhood, to his tertiary education at Cambridge and finally to adulthood and his death in the war. Despite being at the centre of the narrative, Jacob exists in the story only insofar as the narrator and other characters in the novel describe his actions. He is in a sense, a 'non-character', a void in the place where an active protagonist should be. Although Jacob's progression from youth to maturity in essence follows the formal trajectory of a *Bildungsroman*, his lack of interiority complicates the reader's experience of his progress.

The traditional *Bildungsroman* is foregrounded by the dialectic between the protagonist and the reader, who through the act of reading supposedly progresses alongside the protagonist towards moral and social harmony. As Marc Redfield describes it, the *Bildungsroman* contains the "whisper of a profound homology between pedagogy and aesthetics, the education of a subject and the figuration of a text. The *Bildungsroman*, in short, is a trope for the aspirations

of aesthetic humanism.”⁹ The ‘aesthetic humanism’ that Redfield describes here is the idea that the right kind of aesthetic education (in Jacob’s case, Beethoven, Plato and Aristotle among others) can generate an ethical disposition in the individual reader that benefits society as such. By distancing her primary character from the narrative, Woolf disrupts the *Bildungsroman* convention of moral development for both the protagonist and the reader because she bars the reader from accessing Jacob’s personal growth, intellectual and moral development. The reader thus watches rather than ‘grows with’ the protagonist and that alienation from identification frustrates any kind of process of subjectification that reading and interpreting the novel could perform.

Woolf continues to play with unconventional characterisation and plot, producing different effects when representing subjectivity, in *Orlando* (1928), a novel written for and based partly on Woolf’s friend and lover Vita Sackville-West, which traces the life of an English nobleman, Orlando, from the Renaissance through to the 1920’s. Orlando, who changes into a woman sometime in the eighteenth century, lives for four hundred years. Orlando’s aesthetic education is centred on poetry which he/she reads and writes throughout the four hundred years that constitute the novel’s chronotope.¹⁰ Orlando undergoes two progressions during his/her lifetime, first as a man and then as a woman. Orlando’s progression is tied to an exploration of sexuality, history, the historically determined roles of men and women – the formation of a self, suspended between epochs and correspondingly between genders. In other words, Woolf alerts us to the ways that one’s sexuality and subjectivity are determined by the ideologies and accepted norms of a particular time and place, a recurrent

⁹ Redfield, M., *Phantom Formations, Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 39

¹⁰ The ‘chronotope’ is a term created by Bakhtin to describe how configurations of time and space are represented in the language, plot and progression of a novel. Time in this sense refers to different configurations of time, for example linear time, while space refers to the literal and figurative space of the novel, geographically, politically, socially and so on. The term ‘chronotope’ is particularly useful in discussing *Orlando* which toys with time and space not only in the progression of the protagonist through four centuries, but also in the novel’s concern with the effect of time on the development of a sexuality and subjectivity.

theme in Woolf's *Bildungsromane* that I will discuss further in chapters one and two respectively.

What is clear in Woolf's experimentation with the *Bildungsroman* genre is that her protagonists and plots differ exceptionally from the protagonists and plots of traditional novels of formation in the German tradition where, as Hegel tells us with more than a touch of irony, the hero "in the end usually gets his girl and some kind of position, marries and becomes a philistine just like the others."¹¹ Rather Woolf's novels work to challenge and critique the typical conventions of characterisation, narrative construction and novelistic fiction in the *Bildungsroman* genre. Her recurrent use and adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* genre in many of her novels are significant in that different configurations of the genre are always tied to their specific social and political contexts. This historically determined mode of generic iteration foregrounds the *Bildungsroman*'s malleability to the material circumstances that generate its ideological content and form. In this sense, the *Bildungsroman* genre is arguably the most ready-made form for the modernist novel, which attempts to capture the numerous fragmentary conceptions and sensations of the everyday. Furthermore, the *Bildungsroman* genre is characterised in part by a deliberate and calculated interaction between the author, protagonist and reader, a relationship that develops through an aesthetic education. Woolf's lifelong concern with reading and reader reception, evident in her diaries and essays, alongside her characteristically intertextual novels, indicates that she wrote with the aesthetic education of her readers in mind.

More than any of her other novels, *The Waves* (1931) centres on the development of reader and protagonist. Indeed, I contend that the relation between the reader and the protagonist becomes the axis around which all action takes place in the novel. Despite this, to date, *The Waves* has received little critical attention as a novel of formation and acculturation.

¹¹ Hegel, G.W.F., *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 558

Jean Giuguet's *Virginia Woolf and Her Works* (1962) was for many years the standard work of critical reference in Woolf studies. Giuguet's study of *The Waves* is concerned with the aesthetic configurations of passing time in the novel, both in the internal monologues of the six characters and in the corresponding rhythmic descriptions of the external world. Critics such as Jack F. Stewart, who explores the use of light, colour and form in Woolf's writing and Alen McLaurin, who relies on the aesthetic theories of G.E. Moore and Roger Fry in a formalist analysis of *The Waves*, have also noted the significance of Woolf's aesthetics in conveying the relation between the self, the external world and the passing of time. I return to and expand on these themes in chapters one and two by drawing on scholarship by critics such as Elicia Clements and Emma Sutton, whose recent important contributions to Woolfian studies explore the intersections between music, nationality, class and gender through a comprehensive study of Woolf's musical interests and the aesthetic experiments of the Bloomsbury Group. The influence of the Bloomsbury group and Woolf's social and political context more broadly has received extensive attention from critics such as Alex Zwerdling, who maps the influence of politics, historical events and social movements on Woolf's personal beliefs and major literary works. Further studies by Feminist critics like Ann Fernald and Ann Ronchetti unpack the significance of gender and sexuality in *The Waves* in ways that support the claims I have to make about queerness in chapter two. The most recent contributions to Woolf studies have focused dominantly on critical readings of *The Waves* developed in line with current trends in ecocriticism, which includes the work of Bonnie Kime Scott and Vicki Tromanhauser.

All of the scholars mentioned here have made exceptional and varied contributions to Woolf studies centred on three key elements of her work: aesthetics, politics and the relation between the subjective self and the external world. These three elements are not only prominent thematics in *The Waves* but in the *Bildungsroman* genre more generally. *The Waves* is undoubtedly an unconventional novel of formation, but the expansive potential of the genre

suggests that the novel of formation is subject to myriad forms. Indeed, the emergence of feminist, minority and post-colonial studies in the 1980's and 1990's led to a transformation in the definition of this genre. According to Tobias Boes, "the genre was broadened to include coming-of-age narratives that bear only cursory resemblance to nineteenth-century European models."¹² In the 1980's in particular, two seminal scholarly contributions to genre theory were translated into English and changed the way that the *Bildungsroman* was defined in English literary studies: the first edition of Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987) and Mikhail Bakhtin's 'The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism' (1986).

In his important contribution to *Bildungsroman* studies, Moretti argues that the *Bildungsroman* genre traditionally glorified youth (the formative years) as the most meaningful period of personal growth, an idea that would be further explored as central to the British imperial project in Jed Esty's recent study *Unseasonable Youth, Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development* (2012). The idea of a 'meaningful youth' is a relatively new concept that only emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century. In many ways, youth was determined in accordance with the ability to fulfil social duty. Young people learned skills through – depending on class, gender and social status – apprenticeship or education that would enable them to follow in the trade or social responsibilities of their forebears. As noted by Moretti the *Bildungsroman* genre developed in tandem with the turn in European culture towards a definition of youth as a classifiable stage in human development. This is evident in the earliest known prototype of the *Bildungsroman*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-1796). For Meister, apprenticeship ceases to follow the traditional

¹² Boes, T., 'Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman* Historical Survey of Critical Trends', *Literature Compass*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2006, p. 231

trajectory of predictable progress towards his father's work. Rather, as Morretti aptly describes it, Meister's apprenticeship is "an uncertain exploration of social space" and furthermore,

...a necessary exploration: in dismantling the continuity between generations, as is well known, the new destabilising forces of capitalism impose a hitherto unknown *mobility*. But it is also a yearned for exploration, since the selfsame process gives rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an *interiority* not only fuller than before, but also perennially dissatisfied and restless.¹³

Increased social mobility and a break from traditional bonds often embedded in the family form facilitated a growing preoccupation with the interiority of the protagonist, with the inner life. This sense of interiority, developed in correspondence with a changing world, would be echoed and cultivated in the *Bildungsroman* genre. As the modern world changes, the possibilities for developing a subjectivity and self within it become more complex.

The variety of subject formation in the *Bildungsroman* is captured in more detail in Mikhail Bakhtin's 'The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism'. Here Bakhtin also draws on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* to make a larger point about the *Bildungsroman* as a genre that changes the configuration of time in the novel. According to Bakhtin, Goethe saw man's emergence as tied to his actions and his actions as determined by the world around him. In *Wilhelm Meister*, the formerly immobile background of the socioeconomic, political and moral landscape represented in novels before the late eighteenth century "begins to pulsate [...] and this pulsation determines the more superficial movement and alteration of human destinies and human outlooks."¹⁴ In other words, the boundaries between the interior and exterior world are blurred, as each merges into the other. The world becomes dynamic and the hero must find meaning within it.

¹³ Moretti, F., *The Way of the World, The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 4

¹⁴ Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 30

As such, whereas Moretti focuses largely on the significance of youth in the *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin provides us with comprehensive and diverse models of the *Bildungsroman* as it develops over time and in line with changes in the ways that human beings interact with a changing world, its politics, society and morals. In particular, two formulations of the *Bildungsroman* genre, the ‘novel of ordeal’ and the ‘novel of emergence’ provide contrasting but pivotal frameworks through which we can trace this progression. The ‘novel of ordeal’ takes place in ‘adventure time’ and in this way, it partakes of a long standing tradition of representing quests in medieval European romances, a genre that first appears in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. ‘Adventure time’ consists of “the most immediate units – moments, hours, days – snatched at random from the temporal process.”¹⁵ Furthermore, because of the absence of historical time, “emphasis is placed only on differences and contrasts” in experience.¹⁶ Experience in this sense is individual, subjective and largely removed from the “wholeness of such sociocultural phenomena as nationalities, countries, cities, social groups, and occupations.”¹⁷ In other words, the individual’s development is facilitated by tasks and deeds that directly correspond to his or her personal development and do not necessarily impact on and are not impacted by larger world structures.

The ‘novel of ordeal’ comes closest to the traditional conception of the *Bildungsroman* as an art form that attempts to create ‘good political subjects.’ The focus of this particular type of *Bildungsroman* on select momentary experiences rather than larger socio-political structures ensures that the protagonist develops a subjectivity in correspondence with a fixed ideology (as evident in Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774) rather than through a critical

¹⁵ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 11

¹⁶ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 11

¹⁷ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 11

engagement with material reality. Conversely, the ‘novel of emergence’, which takes place in ‘real historical’ or ‘cyclical’ time, “with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature” traces the progression of the protagonist in correspondence with a nuanced and changing world configured to capture a certain wholeness of time and space.¹⁸ The hero emerges at the close of the narrative as a ‘new man’ who enters into “a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence.”¹⁹ As such, the protagonist develops a subjectivity that is both determined by and determines material reality.

Borrowing from Bakhtin, I will reveal that in *The Waves* two characters, Percival and Bernard, stand out as heroes typical of the ‘novel of ordeal’ and the ‘novel of emergence’ respectively. *The Waves*, written in ‘real historical time’ is a ‘novel of emergence’ with Bernard as the primary protagonist. However, Woolf toys with the form by introducing moments of static linear time in which Percival dominates the narrative, unseating Bernard momentarily as the primary focaliser. In this way, Woolf sets up a comparison between the old formulation of the genre and the new in order to critique the conventions of fiction and its role in subject formation. In doing this, she locates the *Bildungsroman* within a larger historical narrative by altering the purpose and meaning of the more conventional ‘novel of ordeal’ to reflect the politics and society of twentieth-century England. To explore the implications of this insight further, I have divided this study into three parts that focus on three key aspects of the *Bildungsroman* genre: the politics of subject formation, aesthetic education, and reader reception.

In chapter one, I argue that in *The Waves*, Woolf appropriates yet also transforms the traditional *Bildungsroman* by characterising the silent seventh character Percival as a hero

¹⁸ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 23

¹⁹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 24

typical of the ‘novel of ordeal’. Notions of youth and empire linked to Percival act as counterpoints to the progression of the novel’s central figure, Bernard. The novel not only ties Percival to empire and imperialism, the ideology of which was central to nation building practices in England in the early twentieth century, but also connects this character to more conventional characterisations of protagonists in traditional *Bildungsromane* written to advance the development of ‘good subjects’ who would serve society and state. Furthermore, I show that Woolf critiques the *Bildungsroman* in order to evoke a larger comparison between the conventions of literary fiction and the conventions of narratives of empire and nation building by exposing the story-telling techniques used to give false legitimacy to both types of discourse.

Chapter two focuses on the representation of aesthetic education in *The Waves*. The aesthetic education outlined in *The Waves* comprises poetry and music, and more specifically, the poetry of antiquity and the late sonatas of Ludwig von Beethoven. Both ancient poetry and Beethoven’s music have surfaced in Woolf’s earlier *Bildungsromane*, and most notably in *The Voyage Out* (1915), where the protagonist Rachel Vinrace often “plays very late Beethoven Sonata[s],”²⁰ and in *Mrs Dalloway*, where the protagonist notes that she doesn’t “know a word of Greek” but, “could listen to it forever” and imagines herself reading “Plato [...] in the original Greek.”²¹ In *The Waves*, however, I argue that Woolf brings together poetry and music, and that they function as an aesthetic education in two different but integrated ways. In keeping with the traditional formulation of the *Bildungsroman*, poetry forms an integral part of the aesthetic education of all three of Woolf’s male characters. More specifically, Louis and

²⁰ Woolf, V., *The Voyage Out*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classics Series, 1915, p. 282

²¹ Woolf, V., *Mrs. Dalloway*, London, Penguin, 1925, p. 38

Neville draw on ancient poetry to formulate a sense of self as queer²² within their contemporary moment and also within broader shared narratives of history and time.

The musicality of Woolf's work, I argue, forms part of a conversation between art forms and between the reader and the text. Aesthetic education in *The Waves* is not concerned with introducing the protagonist or the reader to a privileged curriculum or art forms chosen for their moral or ideological content. Rather, Woolf absorbs the art forms of poetry and music into the very structure of *The Waves*, thereby creating her novel as the primary aesthetic source in the education of both her primary character Bernard – whose subjectivity is determined by his interpretation of the events of the novel – and the reader. *Bildungsromane* like *The Waves* are specifically designed to encourage reader creativity because of the performative work that they do in generating an interactive landscape that actively invites the participation of the reader. This chapter comprises a detailed formal analysis of how music and poetry contribute to the chronotope, structure and thematic content of the novel and thus define the landscape with which the reader interacts.

The final chapter in this study, like the final section of *The Waves*, is centred on Bernard and his overarching role as story teller and creative interpreter of the events of the novel. In the final section of the novel, Woolf solves the separateness of the six dialogues that constitute the novel's narrative by merging them into a single subjectivity. Bernard emerges at the close of the narrative as a fully formed being whose subjectivity is founded on a process of interpretation of, and interaction with, the external world, a composite of experiences, identities, and mutual bonds. Bernard, as a hero typical of a 'novel of emergence', appears at

²² 'Queer' is a term that refers to individuals whose place in society, sexuality, gender identification or sexual preference is outside of the socially accepted 'norms' of a given time and place. In the context of early twentieth-century England, heterosexual relations within the acceptable bounds of marriage were considered normative. Deviation from these norms, especially with regard to sexuality, could be termed queer. 'Queer' in this sense can also refer to those who feel outside of society in some way, or are unable to fully assimilate the ideals of a given society.

the end of his progression with the creative faculties necessary to interpret and create an ordered whole out of the fractured and disparate elements that have worked on the formation of his subjectivity. To fully articulate Bernard's emergence, Woolf shifts the dialogue in the final section from private internal monologue to direct speech engagement with an external being, the reader. This not only alerts the reader to the materiality of the text and the process of reading itself, but it also draws him or her into direct engagement with Bernard. By drawing on the philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion of the 'distribution of the sensible' as it pertains to reading and writing in 'The Method of Equality' (2009) I argue that the reader emerges, like Bernard, as a creative interpreter and organiser of the novel's content who is able to apply his or her creative faculties to the understanding, ordering and organising of material reality, a mode of subjectification that has distinctive political implications since it underscores agency, especially compared to Althusser's flatter notion of subjection as 'hailing'. Indeed, recent critical studies, such as Joseph Slaughter's ground breaking study *Human Rights Inc.* (2007), have shed new light on the role that the *Bildungsroman* has played in subject-making practices and in the way that humanity has defined itself through the centuries. I contend that *The Waves* challenges the hierarchical modes of subject-making practices enforced by formal government in England at the time, and that Woolf thus uses the *Bildungsroman* to redefine the 'British subject' by introducing the notion of an already-existing equality of intelligence into subjectification. In doing so subjectification ceases to represent the Foucauldian idea that our subjectivities are acted upon by the power relations around us. Rather, subjectification is the process of forming a collective subject who acts on the premise of equality. Thus, I conclude by arguing that *The Waves* is a *Bildungsroman* written for the common reader, and that Woolf intervenes in processes of subjectification by creating a novel that relies on and thus verifies the equal ability of all readers to creatively and critically interpret its events and form. In doing so the common reader is also created as a 'common reading subject' emancipated from the

formal subject-making practices of his her socio-political moment through the recognition of the emancipatory potential of self-development.

In more traditional formulations of the *Bildungsroman*, a person emerges as a fully formed subject but the surrounding world remains static. An individual must adapt and perceive the world in its static form as something that he or she must enter into and join. Conversely, in *The Waves* as a ‘novel of emergence’, a person emerges “along with the world and he [sic] reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other.”²³ In other words, the protagonist and the reader develop subjectivities by progressing together through time. The subject that emerges at the close of the narrative does so with the understanding that the past epoch has shaped his or her being, and the future epoch will likewise contribute to further changes and developments in his or her being. Woolf writes *The Waves*, published in 1931, in the period almost exactly half way between the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War. The novel captures the unease of a society at the point of transition between different kinds of politics, the expansion of social spheres and new technologies that would definitively change the way that men and women experienced and participated in the world, as well as a technology of death that would radically alter the political and ethical vision of not only English but also European culture. The *Bildungsroman*, which advocates for an aesthetic education, can become an alternative to politics and political narratives in subject making practices during times of social and political unrest. By analysing *The Waves*, I will prove that Woolf utilizes but also transforms the *Bildungsroman* in order to reveal the complex ways that writing and reading practices can intervene in the process and politics of subject-formation in early twentieth century England.

²³ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 23

Chapter One: Percival, Imperialism and the Politics of Subject Formation

Introduction

In *Phantom Formations, Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (1996), Mark Redfield makes the following claim:

Ordinarily, we do not think of genres as requiring a model, let alone a visible point of origin; but the *Bildungsroman* is not an ordinary genre: though all generic terms may be considered aesthetic categories, the *Bildungsroman* is the genre *of* aesthetics. In this it differs from a classical genre such as the lyric, for instance, which, for all the aesthetic and ideological investment it has occasioned, bears the traces of multiple and heterogenous histories. The notion of the *Bildungsroman*, however, has no existence apart from either the post-Romantic history of aesthetics, or the aesthetic formalisation that this “genre” takes as its content – in the guise, of course, of the formation of a specific, anthropological subject.²⁴

When Redfield states that novelistic genres do not require a model, he refers to the novel *as genre* and moreover as a genre made up of myriad aesthetic categories. Unlike the fixed dactylic hexameter form of epic poetry that concerns itself dominantly with the heroic and the lyric’s focus on private emotion, the novel genre is limitlessness in its potential with regard to content and form. Specific novelistic genres can be categorised according to certain shared aesthetic characteristics: the realist novel, for example, established in the eighteenth century in works such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) and crystallised in the nineteenth century in novels such as George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1874), gained its appeal from its ability to draw on certain specific tropes, themes, and forms used to represent a detailed depiction of reality in a way that is easily recognised by, and pertains to the lived reality of, a reading audience. For Redfield, genres such as realism can be identified as ‘aesthetic categories’. In other words, these genres generate an aesthetics that is recognisable

²⁴ Redfield, M., *Phantom Formations, Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 65

in terms of a specific configuration of content and form. Redfield goes on to impose a distinction between ‘aesthetic categories’ such as realism, and the *Bildungsroman*, which he defines as the ‘genre of aesthetics’. In other words, rather than the development of an aesthetic category, the *Bildungsroman* genre takes aesthetics as the foundation of its content, a content that fulfils the role of developing a ‘specific, anthropological subject’.

The development of an anthropological subject implies that the *Bildungsroman* protagonist is constituted in line with his or her place in history, in the present and in relation to his or her social reality. In this sense, the *Bildungsroman* is socio-ideological in that it presupposes a direct relation between literature and material reality. Arguably, all novels do this to some extent, but, the *Bildungsroman* is unique in that it not only incorporates historical time into the plot progression and the progression of the protagonist, but also maintains a dialectical relationship with its immediate historical moment by assuming a relation between the progression of the protagonist and the progression of the reader. Therefore, the *Bildungsroman* is the ‘genre of aesthetics’, rather than an ‘aesthetic category’, precisely because the dialectical exchange between novel form and material reality necessitates that the genre (and the aesthetics thereof) change and adapt to the socio-political moment in which it is written.

In many ways, early-twentieth-century England provided the perfect moment for a revival and revision of the *Bildungsroman* form. England faced increased urbanisation, the partial dissolution of previously more secure class divisions, and a then national crisis of confidence after the mass slaughters of World War I. Woolf, and many of her fellow modernist authors such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, sought to create new literary forms to capture a rapidly modernising and distinctively violent world. Deborah Parsons writes that “intrinsic to an understanding of the modernist novel is its preoccupation with the relation of lived reality

and aesthetic form.”²⁵ Woolf’s *The Waves* is no exception to this preoccupation. In *The Waves* Woolf captures the everyday sensations and experiences of lived reality in an attempt to “come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves [the writer], even if to do so [he or she] must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist.”²⁶ As such, unlike the *Bildungsroman* of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which utilised standard novelistic conventions to explore the relation between form and reality, *The Waves* is a reinvention of the *Bildungsroman* designed to capture a rapidly industrialising and modernising English society, then unknowingly suspended between two world wars.

Indeed, *The Waves* shares formal characteristics with the modernist *Bildungsroman* as described by Jed Esty in *Unseasonable Youth* (2012). Esty expands on the popular conception of the modernist preoccupation with form and reality by asserting that English “Modernism exposes and disrupts the inherent conventions of the bildungsroman in order to criticize bourgeois values and to reinvent the biographical novel, but also to explore the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire.”²⁷ In *The Waves*, Woolf, for instance, disrupts the ‘inherent conventions of the *Bildungsroman*’ by developing six characters rather than a single protagonist, although in the end she does unify the characters through one singular voice, making it clear that she both engages and revises the convention of the single protagonist. *The Waves* spans the lives of six individuals from childhood to old age and in one instance, to death. Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, Louis, Neville and Bernard are characterised by a series of dramatic soliloquys through which they narrate their experiences of life in England from the turn of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. The characters’ dramatic soliloquys constitute the novel’s narrative, which omits traditional

²⁵ Parsons, D., *Theorists of the modernist novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 21

²⁶ Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 149

²⁷ Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 3

novelistic supports such as external description and plot. In this sense, Woolf reinvents the biographical novel by recording, in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, characteristics typical of the biography such as "basic and typical aspects of any life course; birth, childhood, school years, marriage, the fate that life brings, works and deeds, death, and so forth" but in an unconventional way.²⁸ Moreover, I argue that Woolf uses multiple perspectives to expose the contradictions in processes of self-formation, especially with regard to the relation between the self, nation and national identity.

In order to explore this relation, Woolf creates unifying scenes in the novel centred on two particular characters: Bernard and the silent seventh character, Percival. Both of these characters are significant for two reasons. First, Woolf uses these characters to explore two interrelated but nevertheless opposing novel forms. Bernard constitutes a third of the novel's narrative and performs the role of recording and later recounting the events of the novel as a whole. As the final voice in the novel, Bernard is the only character to give a full account of his progression from childhood to old age. Bernard's progression therefore follows the *Bildungsroman* model of the 'novel of emergence', as described by Bakhtin.²⁹ The hero in the novel of emergence gains complexity as he progresses, and as such at the close of the narrative, "one finds a dynamic unity in the hero's image."³⁰ Conversely, Percival appears to the reader only in so far as he is imagined and experienced by the novel's six speaking characters. Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, Louis, Bernard and Neville create Percival for us as a military hero, an imperialist. He is perceived as a perfect embodiment of bravery and wholeness of being. Percival as he is imagined provides us with the central point around which much of the novel's

²⁸ Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 17

²⁹ Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 21-22

³⁰ Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 21

action takes place. His youthful, boyish endeavours, grand (imagined) heroism and untimely death follow the model of a novel in the medieval romance tradition, or as Bakhtin terms it the ‘novel of ordeal’, wherein the hero must undergo and overcome a series of challenges or ordeals. Percival is a static hero, who dominates the scenes in which he is present, and as such in these scenes “the surrounding world and the secondary characters are transformed into a mere background for the hero, into decoration, a setting.”³¹ Furthermore, Percival’s static characterisation ensures that “There is no real interaction between the hero and the world”, a trope in this novel form advanced by his silence.³² Percival’s silence also constructs him as a mythic character in the sense that his adventures and characteristics are imagined by the six speaking characters and told to the reader. Percival’s static heroism is reinforced by his name, which alludes to the famed knight Percival of Arthurian legend who first appears in works such as Chrétien de Troyes’ *le Conte du Graal* (dated between 1135 and 1190), Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* (dated to the first quarter of the 13th Century) and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485).

In *The Waves*, Bernard and Percival, as heroes typical of the ‘novel of emergence’ and the ‘novel of ordeal’ respectively, create for us two ways of interpreting the events of the novel. Furthermore, Woolf uses these novelistic tropes to set up a complex critique of twentieth-century English society, suggesting a correspondence between the forms of fiction and material reality. Indeed, the second way that these characters are significant is in their representation of two ideologies tied to the formation of subjects in twentieth-century England. As I will show in chapter three, Bernard represents a subjectivity formed in correspondence with ‘real lived experience’, in keeping with the ‘novel of emergence’. Percival, on the other hand, as an

³¹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 15

³² Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 15- 16

imperialist, advances a formation of subjectivity in keeping with the ideology of empire, especially the version prominent in English society at the time that *The Waves* was written. Woolf uses the trope of ‘the static hero’ to suggest a relation between the fictional static heroism of the ‘novel of ordeal’ and the fictional construction of a national identity tied to empire and imperialism. In order to fully explore these parallel *Bildungsroman* forms, their correspondence with material reality, and their implications for the development of the six characters in the novel, Woolf creates three unifying scenes, all of which take place in a restaurant.

In this chapter, I focus on Percival as he is imagined in the text by each of the six speaking characters. Percival brings the six together in two dinner scenes. The first celebrates his departure for India. The second gathers the six together to remember the now dead Percival who is killed in a riding accident while serving the empire. Percival’s role as an imperialist and his associations with India must be taken seriously in any critical reading of this book. In the late nineteenth century, and moving into the early twentieth century, India was the “brightest jewel in the imperial crown”, and was essential to, if not the centre, of the British economy.³³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ‘informal empire’, which functioned under the guise of trade with India, was replaced by ‘formal empire’ after the Indian mutiny of 1857. The onset of the First World War coupled with a second industrial revolution in America and Germany found England ill-equipped to participate in the new technologies developing in the sciences and having an economic impact, such as new methods in steel manufacturing. The stock market crash of 1929 created domestic discontent, fuelled by mass unemployment and state spending in the Empire. To manage domestic discontent, the idea of empire was used to promote national unity.

³³ Hobsbawn, E., *The Age of Empire*, United States, Random House, 1989, p. 69

Jane Marcus' ground breaking study 'Britannia Rules *The Waves*' (1992) recognizes the ways that British imperialism shapes Woolf's novel. In her study, she uncovers the "submerged mind of Empire", which she identifies by focussing on reading Bernard as a poet and Percival as a hero. Marcus, through this reading, suggests that in *The Waves*, Woolf advances a veiled but cogent attack on imperialism.³⁴ Patrick McGee echoes this notion that the critique of empire is implicit in the book, but he insists that *The Waves* offers only partial critique of the British Empire. By contrast, Joanne Tidwell, Anne Fernald and Eric Warner, among others, mention Percival and his associations with Imperial India only briefly, likening him to Woolf's brother Thoby or noting that he is the best loved of the seven characters in the novel; none of these critics offers a systematic reading of this figure. Although it seems impossible to ignore undertones of imperialism in Percival's characterisation in the text, as Marcus and McGee note, few have considered the implication of his presence in the lives of the six speaking characters and their experience of modernity. My reading of *The Waves* as a *Bildungsroman* changes the terms of this argument about imperialism in the text by seeking to uncover Percival's aesthetic and ideological importance in the novel as it pertains to his imagined heroism and his associations with empire.

If we read *The Waves* as a novel of self-formation, then Percival represents not only a critique of imperialism but also of masculinity, one that does particular work challenging the visions of national unity and the formation of the subject. Percival is created as a doubly fictional character – in the imaginations of the six speaking characters and formally in *The Waves* as a fictional novel – to expose the idea of empire as a fiction in itself. As a silent character, he does not narrate his experiences. In this way, Percival is an 'idea', rather than a fully formed being. The link between the individual and the collective is thus laid bare, when

³⁴ Marcus, J., 'Britannia Rules *The Waves*', in K. Lawrence (ed.), *Decolonising Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1992, p. 136

during the two dinner scenes centred on Percival, the six speaking characters attempt to negotiate their individual subjectivities in correspondence with the ‘ideal’ of Percival’s imagined perfection. Woolf introduces tensions into these negotiations by placing temporal and situational constraints on the dinner scenes, forcing the internal dialogues of the six characters to measure each against the other in a continuous process of self-definition. All the characters imagine their relationship with the other, with their own self in an immediate location and with their experience of their past development. In doing so each character attempts to define the ways that these imaginings of the other—the present contemporary self and the self in the broader sense of past experience—intersect to inform their individual subjectivities. I reveal that Percival becomes the ultimate other against which they attempt to form independent subjectivities, while his imagined unifying potential creates a false sense of togetherness.

Self, Nation and Empire

In Woolf’s diaries and essays, she has often remarked on the pressures and procedures of formal dinner parties, which she identifies as settings that invite ideological conformity and conflict. In an essay titled ‘22 Hyde Park Gate’ (1920), Woolf narrates some of her first experiences of formal dinners and parties attended as a part of her half-brother George’s attempts to facilitate her ‘coming out’ in society. At the first of many dinners, she recalls a sudden “twitch, a shiver, a convulsion of amazing expressiveness” which “shook the countess by [her] side.” Woolf continues: “her diamonds, of which she wore a chaste selection, flashed in my eyes; and stopping, I saw George Duckworth blushing crimson on the other side of the table. I realised that I had committed some unspeakable impropriety.”³⁵ In this instance, Woolf had been animatedly airing her views on Plato’s dialogues. This was considered ill-behaviour

³⁵ Woolf, V., ‘22 Hyde Park Gate’, J. Schulkind (ed.), *Moments of Being*, London, Grafton Books, 1989, p.190

for a young woman of eighteen in the company of a member of the aristocracy. Woolf captures in this brief description of the countess's reaction to a deviation from the norm, the conformity associated with formal dinners. Furthermore, she is instantly and instinctively aware of her misstep based on the countess's reaction. The countess does not need to chastise Woolf when her reaction alone performs the work of social conditioning. Before attending this particular dinner, Woolf had been unaware of the conventions that governed 'appropriate' dinner conversation. Afterwards, she feels "old and experienced and disillusioned and angry."³⁶ Woolf's initiation into formal society 'ages' her. She experiences a moment of social conditioning that alters her being and contributes to her formation of a self. As such, if we consider the profound effect that 'coming out' in society had on Woolf's personal development, it follows that the scenes in *The Waves* where the theme of self-formation are most acute is when the six characters are thrown together to dine formally and socially. In these scenes, the monologues of the six are placed side by side in reference to each other during a limited, controlled period of time, and a shared, contained, and moreover public, location (in both cases a restaurant).

The tense and expectant atmosphere of both dinner parties sets the scene for the uneasy relationship between the six speaking characters and the silent seventh character Percival. The first dinner, which takes place in London, begins with the six characters anxiously awaiting Percival's arrival. Bernard describes Neville by noting that, "Every time the door opens he looks fixedly at the table – he dare not raise his eyes – then looks for one second and says "He has not come."³⁷ Neville, like the others, feels unstable and out of place without Percival's presence. Percival, who is described by his friends as an ideal Englishman, invites conformity, which is intensified by the restaurant setting, evident in the anxiety – deepened by the repetition

³⁶ Woolf, V., '22 Hyde Park Gate', J. Schulkind (ed.), *Moments of Being*, London, Grafton Books, 1989, p. 193

³⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 92

of the door which opens and “goes on opening” – that unfolds in all six as they participate in the ceremony of dinner: “The hostility, the indifference of other people dining here is oppressive.”/ “...my shabby dress, my square tipped finger-nails, which I at once hide under the table-cloth.”/ “I smoothed my hair when I came in, hoping to look like the rest of you.”³⁸ Bernard, whose “hair is untidy, but he does not know it” when he enters the restaurant, “smooth[s] his hair, not from vanity (he does not look in the glass), but to propitiate the god of decency.”³⁹ Bernard’s automatic propitiation of the ‘god of decency’ suggests something ritualistic about public dinners and social interaction. This, alongside the oppression of other diners, the need to hide imperfections and the unwillingness to stand out indicates the urge to conformity. The restaurant and the particulars of dining (table manners, dress code, and suitable public discourse) act as a microcosm of a broader society governed by convention. When Bernard arrives, Neville remarks that,

He half knows everybody; he knows nobody (I compare him with Percival). But now, perceiving us, he waves a benevolent salute; he bears down with such benignity, with such love of mankind (crossed with humour at the futility of “loving mankind”), that, if it were not for Percival, who turns all this to vapour, one would feel, as the others already feel: Now is our festival; now we are together. But without Percival there is no solidity. We are silhouettes, hollow phantoms moving mistily without a background.⁴⁰

Neville describes Bernard as engaging fully with the scene and other diners as he enters the restaurant. He ‘half knows everybody’ and simultaneously ‘knows nobody’ in keeping with his fascination with recording in his notebook the people around him and the effect that they have on his being: “I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me.”⁴¹ Whereas Bernard is ‘made and remade’ by the world around him, Percival is allocated the contradictory role of turning ‘all this to vapour’, while simultaneously providing a ‘solid

³⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp.89- 95

³⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 91-92

⁴⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 91

⁴¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 100

background' against which the six can measure themselves. This description of Percival corresponds with the relationship between the 'static hero' and the surrounding world in the 'novel of ordeal'. Bakhtin writes that,

In the majority of cases the surrounding world and the secondary characters are transformed into a mere background for the hero, into decoration, a setting. Nonetheless, the surroundings occupy an important role in the novel [...] But the external world, attached like a background to an immobile hero, lacks independence and historicity.⁴²

In a 'novel of ordeal', the action is centred on the protagonist and his navigation of certain tasks and challenges. As such, the 'surrounding world and the secondary characters' exist only in so far as they form part of and give context to the setting in which these tasks and challenges arise. In scenes focussed on Percival, he forms a central preoccupation for all six characters. Whereas outside of their interactions with Percival, the six will narrate their singular experiences of the surrounding world, it is his presence that creates unity amongst their narratives because they each concentrate on his actions and being. Although the six describe themselves and each other in relation to Percival, this process is secondary to the descriptions of Percival himself. Percival, who is present at these meetings, becomes the ultimate other – through his imagined perfection and wholeness of being – against whom the six attempt to define themselves. Before Percival arrives at the first dinner scene, the six are anxious and feel out of place. When Percival joins the group the six no longer narrate their anxiety and instead focus their narratives on him. As such "All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. Knives cut again."/ "He is conventional; he is a hero."⁴³ In this way, the six speaking characters are 'hollow phantoms moving mistily', until they are concretised in relation to the imagined wholeness of the other. Percival, who is characterised from the start as

⁴² Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 15

⁴³ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp.91- 92

a natural leader, remains static, while his friends attach themselves ‘like a background to an immobile hero’, thereby negating their independence and historicity.

‘Historicity’, in the Bakhtinian sense, refers to the progression of ‘real historical time’, to the messiness of everyday events over long periods of time. Indeed, the Percival-centred dinner scenes differ from the rest of the novel in that they are restrained by set units of time extracted from the otherwise ‘real historical time’ – the chronological progression from childhood to old-age – of the novel’s progression. The dinner scenes take place in linear time typical of the ‘novel of ordeal’, and are therefore “deviations from the historical and biographical course.” As such they possess “a subjective palpability and duration.”⁴⁴ The constraint of time further contributes to the theme of conformity: “But we must go; must catch our train; must walk back to the station – must, must, must.”⁴⁵ The repetition of ‘must’ evokes urgency while onomatopoeically imitating the chugging of a steam train. The train evokes associations with industry, the time schedules of train stations and the urgency of departure. The trope of ‘time’ as a measured form of control is central to Woolf’s earlier novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In *Mrs Dalloway* Sir William Bradshaw, known for his patriotism, is named after ‘bradshaws’: a colloquial term for train schedules. Mrs. Dalloway describes the clocks of Harley Street as ‘shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing time’, and upholding ‘authority’. The chimes of Big Ben radiate throughout London, the ‘leaden circles’ dissolving in the air’, drawing attention to themes of power, control and the weight of centralised authority.⁴⁶ In *The Waves*, despite the arbitrariness of ‘time’, all six characters are subject to it, not only in their interactions within the particular setting and time frame of the novel, but through the process of aging and the accumulation of

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 15

⁴⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 180

⁴⁶ Woolf, V., *Mrs. Dalloway*, London, Penguin, 1925 (1996) p.6/ p. 104/p.54

experience. The experiences relayed by the characters in the novel are divided and dispersed, but still located within the chronological progression of the narrative. In the dinner scenes, time adds urgency to these experiences by isolating them within a particular event made significant by the role that Percival performs in the lives of the six speaking characters in the novel.

In both dinner scenes the six speaking characters construct an image of Percival as a hero by imagining him in scenarios where his bravery and nobility are tested and confirmed. In the first dinner scene, the characters celebrate Percival as a hero about to embark on a trip to India to aid in the colonial project. In the second dinner scene, which brings the six together to commemorate Percival's death, the image of Percival as a hero is heightened and made mystical. He is re-imagined in even greater heroic proportions in his absence. His friends assert that had he not died "he would have done justice for fifty years, and sat in Court and ridden alone at the head of troops and denounced some monstrous tyranny, and come back to us."⁴⁷ This fantasy of Percival as a martial hero, an imperialist, is coupled with an almost religious vision of him as an inspirational and influential saviour-type figure:

The cart sways incompetently from side to side. Now one wheel sticks in the rut, and at once innumerable natives in loin-cloths swarm round it, chattering excitedly. But they do nothing. Time seems endless, ambition vain. Over all broods a sense of the uselessness of human exertion. There are strange sour smells. An old man in a ditch continues to chew betel and to contemplate his navel. But now, behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the west, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitude cluster round him, regarding him as if he were – what indeed he is – a God.⁴⁸

Bernard describes India using imagery stereotypical of popular late nineteenth-century British conceptions of the orient. In this view, the native people appear lazy and ambitionless. The roads are filled with 'ruts', old men lie in ditches and the 'chattering natives' in 'loin cloths'

⁴⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 115

⁴⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 102

are infantilised, depicted as undisciplined, and unable to right the cart due to ‘a sense of the uselessness of human exertion’; they seem outside reason. Percival is introduced into the scene by the grand imperative ‘behold, Percival advances’, evoking imagery of a knight-like figure, not unlike Parsifal in Wagner’s famous opera by the same name. Like the famed knight of the round table, Percival is characterised as a ‘ready-made’ hero typical of the ‘novel of ordeal’ in the medieval romance tradition which combines adventure with the exploration of ‘problems’ associated with the hero’s ideals and standards. The hero is ready-made in the sense that, “the tests (suffering, temptation, doubt) do not become formative experience for him.”⁴⁹ The hero retains the same values and character traits throughout and it is these values and traits that are tested. Percival’s triumph over the bullock-cart is parodic of a trial in a ‘novel of ordeal’ which “admits of nothing average, normal, typical, or ordinary; everything here is expanded to an immense scale.”⁵⁰ Rather than a true test of Percival’s heroism, the simple act of righting a cart is inflated to absurdly heroic proportions as Percival supposedly ‘applies the standards of the West’ to the ‘Oriental problem’. Woolf satirises both the ‘novel of ordeal’ and the imperial project by testing Percival’s ‘standards’ and heroism against an overturned cart – a minor problem that can be solved independent of both heroism and the ‘standards of the West’. It is therefore not a true test of heroism or ‘Western standards’. Furthermore, Bernard’s inability to define ‘Western standards’ and the ‘Oriental problem’ in more concrete terms indicates that the imagined scenario in which Percival is created as a hero is constructed from fragments of fiction rather than factual evidence thereby fictionalising the idea of empire and the supposed Western standards that were associated with the colonial project.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 13

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 13-14

In this way, Woolf reworks the conventions of the medieval romance ‘novel of ordeal’ to emphasise the disparity between the idea of empire and material reality. Neville observes the divide between lived reality and the idea of the empire when he notes that “We sit here, surrounded, lit up, many coloured; all things – hands, curtains, knives and forks, other people dining – run into each other. We are walled in here. But India lies outside.”⁵¹ Bernard constructs an image of Percival based on the fiction of empire, which like the foreignness of colonial India for Neville, is located outside of the reality of lived experience for the six speaking characters in *The Waves*. Percival, whose heroic image is located in an imagined colonial India – like the hero in the ‘novel of ordeal’ – “does not affect the world” as it is experienced by the six speaking characters; “He does not change its appearance; while undergoing tests and vanquishing his enemies, the hero leaves everything in the world in its place.”⁵² The disjunction between the ideology of empire and lived reality exposes Percival’s inability to fully unite the six speaking characters in a solid and whole subjectivity.

Percival’s inability to fully unite the six speaking characters in *The Waves* is made even more visible through his characterisation as a god-like heroic figure by Susan, Jinny, Rhoda, Neville, Louis and Bernard. When Percival triumphs he is recognised as ‘a god’, a claim that hints at the mysticism that formed part of the imperial project. As asserted by Carter, Woolf parodies the “imperial story-tellers’ [...] falsely romantic and heroic image of empire-building”, which reinforced “an unquestioned belief in the superiority of Western ideology and civilization.”⁵³ The ‘unquestioned belief’ that Carter describes here is reminiscent of the

⁵¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 102

⁵² Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 15- 16

⁵³ Carter, F., ‘Bernard’s notebooks: Language and narrative in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*’, *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2002, p. 86

unquestioned belief that followers of Christ and King Arthur placed in the quest for the Holy Grail – an object that was believed to hold the key to salvation for England.

Indeed, the romantic and heroic depictions of Percival in *The Waves* echo Rogelio de Egusquiza y Barrena's painting *Parsifal* (Oil on canvas, 1910) which depicts Wagner's romantic hero emerging from darkness and temptation surrounded by an ethereal light (see Appendix 1).⁵⁴ Egusquiza's juxtaposition of historical iconography works to create an image of Parsifal that depicts his purity (the rejection of Kundry), his religiosity (the ethereal light and Christ-like open-armed pose) and his heroism (the chiton and its significance as a utility garment worn by Greek soldiers in the fifth century B.C.). Similarly, Woolf overlays Percival's heroism with religious imagery. Percival is described as wearing a 'sun helmet,' also called a 'home service helmet', worn by British soldiers in India that identifies him as a martial hero. He is also described as riding a 'flea-bitten mare' alluding to images of Christ riding into Jerusalem, thereby associating Percival with leadership, kingliness and religious devotion. When Neville receives news of Percival's death, he proclaims that "the lights of the world have gone out" evoking Christian associations of Christ with light.⁵⁵ Bernard seeks a place to do 'penance', an act commonly associated with Christian practices of confession and forgiveness: "I could do penance [...] the crimes for which one would do penance in all the markets of the world bareheaded; that one did not go to Hampton Court that day."⁵⁶ The first dinner scene represents in some ways a metaphoric 'last supper' with Percival, while Hampton Court becomes, through its association with Percival, a place of worship.

⁵⁴ Egusquiza was an already established artist who greatly admired Wagner's work. After meeting and developing a friendship with Wagner in 1876, he turned his attention to capturing the iconography of the composer's works. This painting, completed in 1910, would most likely have reflected the characterisation of Parsifal in performances of *Parsifal* at the Bayreuth festival in 1909, which Woolf not only attended but marked as the highlight of the festival. See: Woolf, V., *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, N. Nicolson & J. Trautmann. (eds.), vol. 1, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1977, p. 404

⁵⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 114

⁵⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 120

Percival as an object of the imagination is a reflection of the role that the idea of empire played in masking the dislocations and fractured society of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain. According to Anne Ronchetti, the combination of imperialism and religiosity, with which the other characters regard Percival, suggests something sinister about the nature of twentieth century life:

If twentieth century life – impersonal, mechanised, materialistic, competitive – is inhospitable to difference and thwarts the creative individual's attempts to find self-fulfilment in the expression of his or her creativity, it also breeds in human beings a fundamental insecurity that causes them to seek out forces beyond themselves with which they may identify in order to feel whole and empowered.⁵⁷

In other words, the modern man or woman who finds him- or herself in a fractured and ever-changing society seeks a means of unifying him- or herself with, and developing a subjectivity in correspondence with the ideals and values of a community. Through Percival, Woolf compares religion, which can be defined as a communally shared belief in a higher controlling power(s) to the 'idea of empire' which combined "God, Duty and Empire" in a powerful force: the unifying potential of a national identity designed to make the individual feel 'whole and empowered'.⁵⁸ However, as we see in the penultimate section of *The Waves*, the struggle of the six characters to develop subjectivities within the flux of twentieth century life ultimately fails: "we are laden. Being now all of us middle-aged, loads are on us" / "change is no longer possible. We are committed"/ "...see the narrow limits of my life and the line it cannot pass."⁵⁹ Percival, in whose memory they see the promise of human perfection and untainted youth, becomes their means of attaining unity and affirmation, if only momentarily: "But there was another glory once, when we watched for the door to open, and Percival came."⁶⁰ The glory

⁵⁷ Ronchetti, A., *The Artist, Society & Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 105

⁵⁸ The Empire Movement London, 'Empire Day May 24th Leaflet', www.hants.gov.uk/rh/archives/empire-day.ppt, 1907, (last accessed, 20 November 2015)

⁵⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 162-164

⁶⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 164

that Jinny, Susan, Neville, Bernard and Louis associate with Percival corresponds to the relationship between empire and England.

After the mutiny of 1857, 'formal empire' was established in India. The dissolution of indigenous local governments in India, a direct effect of the undermining of local structures by capitalist exploitation, further established European rule over areas previously not administered by Europeans. At home, the industrial revolution of the early nineteenth century endowed Britain with a vast economic advantage. The addition of steam power to existing industries had improved production and trade in textiles and steel. However, as asserted by Michael Whitworth, the second industrial revolution saw Germany and America advancing in the production of electromagnetics and in the sciences; conversely, "the development of London as an international financial centre in the 1870's and 1880's had brought a short-term advantage, in that it allowed much of the capital created by the first industrial revolution to be invested overseas; but these investments were at the expense of domestic industry".⁶¹ The economic, social and political unrest that arose as a result birthed the idea of 'new imperialism'.

'New imperialism', or 'social imperialism', was designed to merge ideas of national unity and empire. Politicians, aware of the benefits of using 'new imperialism' to dismantle domestic discontent, especially among the bourgeoisie, began to promote the capitalistic gains of the imperial enterprise as a means of implementing social reform and local economic improvement. This was evident in leaflets distributed by the Empire Movement in 1907, the object of which was to generate an "outward sign of an inner awakening of the peoples who constitute the British Empire to the serious duties which lie at their door" and to see a celebration of empire as a celebration of the way that empire "work[s] for others" and "consider[s] the poor and suffering." The leaflet also contained the official "Motto: one King, one flag, one Fleet, One Empire", and the "Watchwords: Responsibility, Duty, Sympathy, Self-

⁶¹ Whitworth, M., *Authors in Context Virginia Woolf*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 32

sacrifice” designed to mobilise the British public in a single act of patriotism with empire as its axiom.⁶² Indeed, more beneficial to the state of a reforming English national identity was the *idea* of imperialism, used to offer “voters glory rather than costly reforms: and what was more glorious than conquests of exotic territories and dusky races, especially as these were usually cheaply [albeit violently] won.”⁶³ Woolf hints at the underlying violence of the imperial/colonial project by ending the poetic prose at the start of section three of *The Waves* with another reference to imagery stereotypical of nineteenth-century imaginings of foreign peoples and places: “The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep.”⁶⁴ The ‘turbaned men with poisoned assegais’ are a juxtaposition of iconic imagery associated with two key colonial regions. The turbans symbolise colonial India, while the assegais, a weapon used by Zulu warriors, symbolise Africa; Britain was invested in a drive to acquire African territories, especially in the southern African regions of the continent so as to dominate and exploit trade routes. The drumming of the waves evokes simultaneously images of the exotic, of war and of the footfalls of men reaching foreign shores. This is compared to the awaiting native populations who must be conquered so as to acquire their land which will be ‘fed on’ (pillaged) by ‘white sheep’ (European settlers). Woolf echoes and expands on this imagery again in the section that follows the poetic prose in a soliloquy spoken by Louis.

Louis, as a business man whose father is a banker in Australia, reflects ‘informal empire’, developed under the guise of trade relations in India. He stands in contrast to Percival who represents the ‘formal empire’ that followed the Indian mutiny of 1857. As the speaking

⁶² The Empire Movement London, ‘Empire Day May 24th Leaflet’, www.hants.gov.uk/rh/archives/empire-day.ppt, 1907, (last accessed, 20 November 2015)

⁶³ Hobsbawm, E., *The Age of Empire*, United States, Random House, 1989, pp. 68-70

⁶⁴ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 55

character most associated with imperialism, he reiterates the violence alluded to in the poetic prose at the start of the section:

My roots go down through veins of lead and silver, through damp, marshy places that exhale odours, to a knot made of oak roots bound together in the centre. Sealed and blind with earth stopping my ears, I have yet heard rumours of wars; and the nightingale; have felt the hurrying of many troops of men flocking hither and thither in quest of civilization like flocks of birds migrating seeking the summer; I have seen women carrying red pitchers to the banks of the Nile.⁶⁵

Woolf uses poetic language to set up an allegorical description of Louis' historically and geographically determined colonial origins. Louis' colonial origins (he is Australian) and his association with 'informal empire' are tied to economic gain, specifically the veins of 'lead' and 'silver'. The 'oak roots bound together' infer the wood of ships and trade routes, while the 'men flocking' harks back to Woolf's description of colonial settlers as 'white sheep'. These flocks 'migrate like birds seeking summer' or rather colonists seeking the wealth of colonial enterprise. The 'earth', the acquisition of land and commodities, 'stops his ears' preventing him from hearing 'rumours of war'. This is in keeping with the ideology of imperialism, which worked not only to unify the British population but also to legitimise the violence of the state. The discontented masses were encouraged – although, notably, not without resistance – to “identify themselves with the imperial state and nation, and thus unconsciously to endow the social and political systems represented by that state with justification and legitimacy.”⁶⁶ However, the golden age of empire – represented in *The Waves* by the golden youth, charisma and religiosity of Percival – which provided a then necessary means of social cohesion and national pride, lost its legitimacy when England went to war with Germany in 1914.

Woolf saw the 'idea of empire' and patriotism as contradictory to the reality of war. She articulates the effect of the war on national unity and identity, when she asks: “When the

⁶⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 71

⁶⁶ Hobsbawm, E., *The Age of Empire*, United States, Random House, 1989, pp. 68-70

guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other's eyes that romance was killed? Certainly it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. So ugly they looked – German, English, French – so stupid.”⁶⁷The First World War was in many ways an imperial war, with England fighting to sustain their strongholds in Europe and in the colonies. Woolf describes the ‘shock’ of war in aesthetic terms as ‘ugly, stupid’, again drawing our attention to the disjunction between lived reality and the romanticised fictions created to glorify war, empire and imperialism. The great losses sustained in the war lead the British public into a second ethical and cultural crisis, exacerbated by the further increased urbanisation of its major cities and a further dissolution of class boundaries, creating new forms of social contact that raised questions about propriety, civility and cross-class bonds. As Louis proclaims during the dinner at Hampton Court, “the lighted strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilisation; the Nile; and all life. Our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness.”⁶⁸ Imperialism was key to the British experience of modernity and promised to unify the world through trade and conquest. Louis expresses this sentiment when he declares: “we have laced the world together with our ships.”⁶⁹ When Louis describes ‘dissolving drops’, the ‘abyss of time’ and ‘darkness’, he infers the unfulfilled ideology of empire, which he contrasts to the fragmented and disorganised society in which he finds himself. For Louis and his friends, Percival's untimely death preserves, along with his youth, his associations with imperialism and the ‘golden age of empire’ before the onset of the First World War and the rise of fascism in Europe. In this way, he embodies a sought after unifying idea, rather than an actual unifying force.

⁶⁷ Woolf, V., ‘A Room of One's Own’, in M.H. Abrams & S. Greenblatt (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Seventh Edition*, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2000, p.2160

⁶⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 173

⁶⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 153

National Fiction and Fictional Narratives

The Waves captures this moment of political, economic and social unrest in Britain. By drawing on narrative techniques that toy with time and space in the two Percival-centred dinner scenes, interwoven with imagery that alludes to imperialism, literary fiction and modernity, Woolf alerts us to the possible dangers of seeking forces outside of oneself, such as nationhood, to impose order in a fractured society. Woolf achieves this in *The Waves* by drawing comparisons between the relationship that her six speaking characters have to the imagined perfection of Percival and the relationship between the English individual and the ideology of national identity. Our experience of the relationship between Percival and the six speaking characters in *The Waves* is an uneasy one. Percival, as a silent character, is presented to the reader as an idea rather than a fully articulated being. He exists in the text only in so far as he is perceived by the six speaking characters. This creates a stark contrast between the deeply personal, individual experiences relayed by the speaking characters and the perfect other whom they imagine unites them. Percival only retains his 'perfection' because he does not articulate his own experiences. As a presence in the novel, constructed purely through the imagination and memory of the six speaking characters, he is a doubly fictional character, preserved as a distinctly masculine ideal. The drive to develop the individual self in line with national identity and social cohesion is undermined by Percival's inability to fully unite Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Louis and Bernard in a solid and whole subjectivity. This lays bare the relation between individual and national identity (the collective) as a fiction in itself.

The role of 'fiction' and the ways that fiction is constructed in modernist society were strong preoccupations for Woolf. Alongside the political connotations of Percival's presence in the text, his character also invites a critique of the nature of modern literary fiction. In *Modern Fiction* (1919), she writes that,

The [modern] writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love, interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccably that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.⁷⁰

In the same way that the six speaking characters in *The Waves*, constrained by the uncontrollable forces of industrialising modernity and social convention, seek conformity by constructing a perfect ‘other’ (“He is conventional; he is a hero.”⁷¹) in Percival, the modern writer is ‘constrained’ by ‘some unscrupulous tyrant’, forcing him to likewise conform his characters to literary conventions and ‘the fashion of the hour.’ As Woolf notes, “The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn.” However, as in her own experience, “more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?”⁷² Woolf answers this question by asserting that if we “look within,”

...life, it seems, is very far from being “like this.” Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant show of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from 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 about what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling 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.⁷³

Woolf rejects the ordering principles of literary convention in favour of the sensory, the everyday experience of reality. By including a common-place narrative of heroism as it develops around Percival, Woolf sets up a counterpoint – a narrative against which she attempts

⁷⁰ Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938 (1925), p. 148

⁷¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp.91- 92

⁷² Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938 (1925), p. 148

⁷³ Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938 (1925), pp. 148-149

to illumine and critique old literary conventions in favour of a novel that concentrates on the sensibilities of the human mind. The human imagination becomes, through the dialogues of her six speaking characters, a lens through which she explores the social, moral and political problems of her time. Her aesthetics in *The Waves* draws on the experience of sensation as an act that transgresses the confines of convention. This invites the question: Is there a relation between Woolf's critique of the fiction of empire as a force which aims to create social cohesion, and her critique of the fictions of narrative convention which fail to capture the inherently unconventional (in the formal sense) myriad sensations of everyday life?

I argue that there is a relation between these two critiques, but that it is not a direct or causal one. Rather the fiction of empire and the empire of fiction share a formal resemblance. The fiction of empire as an ideological invention used to promote national unity works to make sense of an incoherent and contradictory social and economic reality. By locating the narrative of empire elsewhere (in foreign lands and conquests), the fiction of empire attempts to instil a sense of unity within the imagination of the British people. Instead of recognising growing class conflict and economic contradiction locally, the idea of empire tries to create an "imagined community" of British imperial subjects based on a project enacted elsewhere.⁷⁴ In an analogous formal operation, the empires of fiction, as Woolf critiques in the longer quote above, create a narrative coherence that obfuscates the incoherence and contradictions of lived experience, of perception and sensation that every individual experiences in all their diversity. Instead of attempting to represent the 'incessant show of innumerable atoms' that combine to form everyday life, literary fiction locates the narrative in a series of conventionalised tropes and stories that frame that diversity. In this sense, both the idea of empire and literary conventions are fictions that veil complex social phenomena.

⁷⁴ Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 6

As with political discourses of national identity, the constraints of literary convention – plot, genre, accepted style – fall within normative discourses of aesthetics that supposedly define what is immediately pleasing to our auditory or visual perception or to our imagination. Woolf rejects the formal, illusionary aesthetics of traditional fiction by positing an alternative aesthetic experience that liberates the senses and sensory perception from the confines of convention. Thus, the political act posited by Woolf’s aesthetics is the negation of conventional subject-making practices such as ‘national ideology’ in favour of the formation of a subjectivity immersed in and determined by the common and the everyday experience of the common.⁷⁵

Woolf’s method in constructing a new literary form involves the introduction of cyclical time (as opposed to the ‘linear time’ of the novel of ordeal) into the chronotope of her novel. While cyclical time is not uncommon to the novel form, it is uncommon in the *Bildungsroman*. Woolf revises the *Bildungsroman* genre by incorporating cyclical time in the *The Waves*. Furthermore, she enhances the cyclical time of the novel by expanding the ‘space’ of the novel to include sonic stimuli. In the following chapter, which considers aesthetic education in *The Waves*, I will show how the incorporation of music and rhythm in the novel aid in renovating literary form so that it not only introduces ‘real historical’ time into the very fabric of the narrative, but also proposes an alternative to national identity in subject formation.

⁷⁵ Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938 (1925), pp. 152-153

Chapter Two: Acculturation and the Rhythmical Sense

Introduction

If *The Waves* is an unconventional *Bildungsroman* in form and characterisation, it is conventional in its vision of the aesthetic education and acculturation of the individual. In the typical *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist must undergo a process of acculturation – an aesthetic education – that ultimately enables him or her to grow morally and rationally towards the formation of a subjectivity that benefits the state and society more broadly. Redfield confirms this view when he contends that “The *Bildungsroman* narrates the acculturation of a self – the integration of a particular “I” into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus, finally, into the universal subjectivity of humanity – the genre can be said to repeat, as its identity or content, its own synthesis of a particular instance and general form.”⁷⁶ In his description of the acculturation of the individual in the *Bildungsroman*, Redfield draws on Hegel’s famous triad: *allgemein – besonder – einzeln* (universal, particular, individual). The universal refers to the essence of the ‘thing’. When the ‘thing’ becomes actual (*wirklich*), or fully developed, it becomes concrete (*konkret*), the thing-in-itself in its entirety. In the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist, who is initially lacking in the knowledge necessary to negotiate his or her social world, must undergo a journey whereby he or she becomes whole, entire and unified with the ideals of the society in which he or she finds him- or herself. The journey that results in the

⁷⁶ Redfield, M., *Phantom Formations, Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 38

integration of the particular “I” into a community, or rather the formation of the subject, is achieved through the *selbstbildung* of the individual.

What defines the *selbstbildung* of the individual is a cultural education. Russell Berman writes that aesthetic education, “takes place with reference to a particularly privileged curriculum, works of art or, collectively, culture as canon.”⁷⁷ The privileging of certain forms of aesthetic education was determined according to whether or not the ideology of a particular piece of art would promote the formation of ‘good subjects’ who could contribute to and enrich broader society. Franco Moretti writes that the ultimate conclusion to the *selbstbildung* of the individual can be narrated as: “I exist, and I exist happily, only because I have been allowed access to the plot patiently weaved around me [...]. I have acquired form, I exist for myself, because I have willingly agreed to be determined from without.”⁷⁸ The protagonist achieves his or her *bildung* by seeking an aesthetic education that facilitates the willing acceptance and assumption of social ideals.

In *The Waves*, the aesthetic education of Woolf’s six characters takes place primarily in their formative years as is typical of the *Bildungsroman* form. The novel begins with the six children participating in their primary education together. Following this, they are divided when they attend single-sex boarding schools to complete their secondary education. Lastly they divide once again to pursue gender appropriate tertiary educations at university or finishing school, respectively, before entering into society. This particular phase of educational development – from childhood to adulthood – follows the normal conventions of the *Bildungsroman* that maps the progression of a protagonist from childhood to maturity. Susan goes to a finishing school in Switzerland before preparing to enter into marriage and motherhood. Rhoda and Jinny ‘come out’ in society where they describe attendance of dances

⁷⁷ Berman, R., ‘Modernism and the Bildungsroman’, in: G. Bartram (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to The Modern German Novel*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 78

⁷⁸ Moretti, F., *The Way of the World, The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 21

and social gatherings. Initially, Woolf's female characters follow the trajectory of the 'marriage plot' typical of the nineteenth-century women's *Bildungsroman*. All three acquire the appropriate scholarly education, alongside domestic skills such as needlework. All three 'come out' in society. The aesthetic education that Woolf's female characters undertake is one which will allow them to fulfil distinctly feminine roles: wife, mother, and socialite.

Conversely, Woolf's male characters go on to tertiary study where they read the classics and prepare to enter the working world. Louis and Neville read poetry, which both see as a means of understanding and integrating into twentieth-century British society. Bernard, who narrates more of the novel than any other character, notes that he "changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero, whose name I now forget, of a novel by Dostoevsky; was for a whole term, incredibly, Napoleon; but was Byron chiefly."⁷⁹ All three male characters seek self-development through an aesthetic education comprising canonical texts, donning, in Bernard's case, cultural and historical figures, masks that enable him to enact a certain subjectivity. The only common aesthetic education experienced by all six characters is evident in the constant reference to music and rhythm, a theme present in their experiences throughout, whether it be metaphorical in their descriptions of their interactions or literal as all six attend social gatherings, the theatre or dances.

If *The Waves* were to reach its conclusion at the point where the six enter into society, it would follow the traditional *Bildungsroman* trope of the *selbstbildung* almost exactly. However, the progression of Jinny, Rhoda, Susan, Neville, Louis and Bernard continues into adulthood and eventually to old age. Indeed, the crucial turning point in the novel occurs when the six begin to narrate adulthood. Of Woolf's female characters, only Susan completes her *bildung* by becoming a wife and a mother. Rhoda commits suicide and Jinny remains unmarried but enjoys the company of multiple men. Likewise, of her male characters, only Bernard

⁷⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 192

marries and has children. Louis remains a bachelor and dedicates himself to his work as a shipping executive. Neville also remains a bachelor but enjoys the secret company of a man. The maturity and social integration that should have been achieved at the close of the *bildung* are disrupted by the reality of lived experience that appears in the varied trajectories each character takes in her or his life. In other words, the conventional progression of a *Bildungsroman* fails to align with material reality.

In the following chapter, I argue that, in a re-vision of the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre, Woolf's inclusion of specific aesthetic forms in *The Waves* comes to represent something very different from the acculturation of the individual towards greater harmony with the state and society more generally. In order to do so, I focus on the two primary aesthetic forms that Woolf incorporates into the aesthetic education of her characters: poetry and music. In the first section, I consider the influence of poetry on two of Woolf's male characters, Louis and Neville. While Bernard reads poetry and 'makes phrases', Louis and Neville both aspire to be poets, thereby placing poetry at the centre of their aesthetic education. The specific poetry read by both Neville and Louis is the poetry of antiquity.

I contend that Woolf's specific incorporation of classical poetry in her narrative is significant in three ways. Foremost, it allows her to incorporate fellow author and friend T.S. Eliot's conception of 'historical sense' as he outlines it in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917), thereby locating her characters and the text itself within a temporal frame that is both contemporary and traditional. Secondly, epic poetry, which is chiasmic in structure, speaks to a recurrent theme in the text of rings and globes, which infer unity and continuity. I will show that both characters make constant reference to 'steel rings' in relation to epic poetry, a trope that Woolf uses to introduce a complex intertextual reference to Plato's dialogue *Ion*. Woolf could read Greek and makes reference to Plato's dialogues in her diary and essays. In 'On Not Knowing Greek' (1925) she writes that Plato, through rhetoric, could

bring the “whole company by degrees to gaze with him at the truth.”⁸⁰ For Woolf, Plato’s truth was that “what matters is not so much the end we reach as our manner of reaching it”, a sentiment that resonates with the progression of the *Bildungsroman*.⁸¹ In Plato’s *Ion*, steel rings are used metaphorically to describe the chain of inspiration: the poet is the messenger of the muse and the rhapsode is the messenger of the poet. Woolf employs Plato’s metaphor to unify her characters in a single act of creation that is eventually rhapsodised by Bernard in the final section of the novel. The fixed poetic metre – dactylic hexameter – typical of classical poetry generates a particular rhythm (— U | — U | — U | — U | — u u | — X) thereby enhancing themes of music and rhythm in the novel. Finally, epic poetry was sung, not spoken, giving it a decidedly musical quality. In ‘Street Music’ (1905), Woolf asserts that “We should invent – or rather remember – the innumerable metres which we have so long outraged, and which would restore both prose and poetry to the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed.”⁸² As such, poetry contributes to the musicality of *The Waves*.

In her essays and novels, Woolf also displays her fascination with the role of actual music in society. Her early essays, ‘Impressions at Bayreuth’ (1909), ‘The Opera’ (1906) and ‘Street Music’ (1905) address the effect of music on community with a particular focus on affect and listener reception, particularly the behaviour and reactions of audiences to sound alongside the social and behavioural expectations that arise from certain types of music and the location of its performance. Woolf also employs music figuratively in novels such as *The Voyage Out* (1915) where, as noted by Ronchetti, the protagonist Rachel Vinrace is an amateur pianist who negotiates her place in society in correspondence with her aspirations as a musician.⁸³ In an act of social defiance, Rachel climbs “up the steep spiral of a very late

⁸⁰ Woolf, V., ‘On Not Knowing Greek’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938, pp. 40-41

⁸¹ Woolf, V., ‘On Not Knowing Greek’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 41

⁸² Woolf, V., ‘Street Music’, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, A. McNeillie (ed.), New York, Harvest, 1986, p. 31

⁸³ Ronchetti, A., *The Artist, Society & Sexuality in Virginia Woolf’s Novels*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 25

Beethoven sonata”, commonly seen as too difficult for a woman to play.⁸⁴ In *Night and Day* (1919) Woolf makes reference to Mozart’s operas alongside allusions to the constraints of patriarchal society, and as noted by Emma Sutton, *Jacob’s Room* (1922) draws on Wagner’s *Tristan* to critique empire and imperialism.⁸⁵

Woolf notes in her diary that when she was writing *The Waves*, she did “a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone [was] playing late Beethoven sonatas”, indicating the connection between the novel and music at yet a different, historical level.⁸⁶ She writes further that her decision to include Bernard’s final speech happened “while listening to a Beethoven quartet.” She decided to “merge all the interjected passages in to Bernard’s final speech, & end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes, & having no further break.”⁸⁷ She also recalls an evening organised around listening to the final discordant movement of *Opus 130, Große Fuge*. When considering what Woolf listened to, Peter Jacobs notes that her musical tastes were not contemporary to her time; rather, she listened predominantly to Beethoven and Mozart. Gerald Levin asserts a direct link between Beethoven’s *Opus 130* and *The Waves*, but relies heavily on W.N. Sullivan’s *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* to construct his argument. As there is no evidence that Woolf read this particular book, it seems unlikely that it would have influenced her art, especially since her diaries and essays meticulously record so much of what she read. In ‘Transforming Musical Sounds into Words’ (2005), Elicia Clements makes a compelling argument for the influence of Beethoven’s *Opus 130* on Woolf’s invention of a new novelistic form that reconceives the

⁸⁴ Woolf, V., *The Voyage Out*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classics Series, 1915, p. 282

⁸⁵ Sutton, E., *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 78

⁸⁶ Woolf, V., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell (ed.) 5 vols, vol. 3, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1983, p. 139

⁸⁷ Woolf, V., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell (ed.) 5 vols, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1983, p. 3391

construction of ‘characters’.⁸⁸ In the following analysis of the structure of Woolf’s text, I expand on Clements’ argument by proposing a direct comparison between the structure of *Opus 130* and the structure of *The Waves*.

By incorporating music in *The Waves*, Woolf attempts to generate a new novelistic form that combines the specificity of sight with the totalising effect of sound. In ‘A Letter to a Young Poet’ (1932), Woolf writes that to capture the myriad sensations of the everyday, one needs “to stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, boldly and freely, until one thing melts into 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.”⁸⁹ Woolf uses musical terms – rhythm and harmony – to describe the intermingling of material objects such as cars and daffodils, the industrial and the organic respectively. The rhythmic becomes for Woolf a way of generating aesthetic synthesis, a sense of unity that pervades her novels. As such, in *The Waves*, music is incorporated into the very fabric of the text, so as to expand the sensational landscape of the novel and effectively give the impression of ‘the whole.’ In music, a single note, sounding on its own with no context, is devoid of tonality. When sounded in the company of other notes, tonality is generated and tonal space takes form. At the same time, tonal space is reliant on time, both in the sense of musical time/ key signatures but also in the length of the piece or rather the duration of the melody. The musical chronotope thus manifests as a relationship between auditory space and time. Woolf employs music in *The Waves* to enrich the novel’s chronological progression in ‘real historical time’ also called cyclical time. The sonata form, which is cyclical in composition, assists in locating the events of the novel in the *Bildungsroman* form of the ‘novel of emergence’. Bakhtin writes that in the

⁸⁸ Clements, E., ‘Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf’s “The Waves”’. *Narrative*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005.

⁸⁹ Woolf, V., ‘Letter to a Young Poet’, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, London, Hogarth Press, 1966-7, p. 191

‘novel of emergence’, “man’s individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence,” which he marks as cyclical in nature. Furthermore, “Man’s emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its’ profoundly chronotopic nature.”⁹⁰As will be discussed in what follows, Woolf’s strategy is fourfold in its implementation. First, music is used metaphorically to describe the unity of seemingly unrelated elements. Secondly, Woolf makes extended use of onomatopoeia, alliteration and assonance to mimetically incorporate sound into the text itself. Thirdly, *The Waves* follows the structure of a sonata. More specifically, it follows the unconventional structure of Ludwig von Beethoven’s Sonata in B Flat Major *Opus 130*. Lastly, I propose that music works not only to expand the sensational landscape of the narrative but also to introduce ‘real historical time’ into the chronotope of the novel. Thus, I argue that Woolf creates a complex and nuanced sonic and non-sonic landscape in *The Waves* designed to encourage the reader’s participation in the progression of the narrative.

Tradition and the Chain of Inspiration

The ‘poetic’ and ‘poetry’ emerge not only in the poetic and descriptive passages at the start of each section of *The Waves* but also in the experiences of the characters themselves. Notably, the two characters in *The Waves* associated most with poetry are both male and both read classical poetry. At school, Neville hopes to “explore the exactitude of the Latin language, and step firmly upon the well-laid sentences, and pronounce the explicit, the sonorous hexameters of Virgil, of Lucretius; and chant with a passion that is never obscure or formless the loves of Catullus, reading from a big book, a quarto with margins.”⁹¹ Louis imagines that

⁹⁰ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 23

⁹¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 22

he is “Virgil’s companion, and Plato’s.”⁹² The classical poets that Neville and Louis reference famously used dactylic hexameter – also called ‘heroic verse’ – which is a poetic form characteristic of epic poetry. Both, furthermore, attempt to understand the contemporaneity of their immediate experiences by containing them within the fixed forms of classical poetry. Their sense of the contemporary as it connects to the past evokes what T.S. Eliot describes in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1917) as ‘historical sense’. According to Eliot,

[...] the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

Eliot’s conception of tradition presents us with a set of contradictions. The artist must be aware of the ‘pastness of the past’ but also its contemporary ‘presence’; it is located simultaneously in the past and in the current moment. The artist must be both ‘out of time’ and ‘in time’ at the same time, a paradox. The past for Eliot exists for the artist as a set of fragments, not unlike the ‘myriad atoms’ that Woolf associates with the sensations of the everyday. The idea that ‘historical sense’ and the contemporary are in ‘the bones’ of the artist suggests that in order for the ‘historical sense’ to develop from these fragments, there needs to be a ‘self’ and consciousness in which this development can take place. The self is the contemporary self, and as such occupies a certain place in time, a certain present. The fragments of the past collide with the fragments of the present by combining in the mind of the artist. This results in a process of cultural synthesis. As such, the historical sense is as much an act of imagination as it is of acculturation. Eliot writes that, “This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place

⁹² Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 38

in time, of his own contemporaneity.”⁹³ The ‘timeless’ alongside ‘the temporal’ implies a continuous process of addition and complication. The contemporary consciousness of the artist must not only make sense of ‘what is already there’ – the dead artists of the past – but also of their place in the present. According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, “the “historical sense” has to be integrated into an unconscious knowledge, which is less a knowledge of the cultural past than a part of the psyche without which my “present” would never take shape or meaning.”⁹⁴ In short, Eliot suggests that we cannot begin to understand our place in the present without first acquiring a sense of how the past affects our perception of the world in psychically complex ways.

This idea is crystallised in Eliot’s ‘The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism’ (1933) in which he writes that poetry “may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world.”⁹⁵ Louis and Neville both turn to the poetry of antiquity to articulate feelings towards the contemporary that are at odds with the social world in which they find themselves. Neville states that he will “chant with a passion that is never obscure or formless the loves of Catullus, reading from a big book, a quarto with margins.”⁹⁶ The precise language of the ‘loves’ of Catullus, who in his poetry famously addressed his male friends as lovers, sublimates Neville’s own inability to fully and publicly articulate his attraction to men and more specifically, his attraction to Percival, “for it is Percival who inspires poetry”⁹⁷. He is able to ‘step firmly upon the well-laid sentences’ in Catullus’ poetry in a way that he is unable to translate into the lived experience of his day-to-day interactions, in part because of social interdictions against same-

⁹³ Eliot, T.S., ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in: *Selected Essays*, London, Faber and Faber, 1932, p. 14

⁹⁴ Rabaté, J., ‘High Modernism and the Bifurcation of Tradition’, A.D. Moody (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 215

⁹⁵ Eliot, T.S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London, Faber & Faber, 1933, p. 155

⁹⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 22

⁹⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 28

sex desire. This uncertainty manifests in his own poetry: “Yet it is incredible that I should not be a great poet. What did I write last night if it was not poetry? [...] I do not know myself sometimes, or how to measure and name and count out the grains that make me what I am.”⁹⁸

When he finally admits his love of Percival in a poem, he shares it with Bernard, stating,

I would rather be loved, I would rather be famous than follow perfection through the sand. But am I doomed to cause disgust? Am I a poet? Take it. The desire which is loaded behind my lips, cold as lead, fell as a bullet, the thing I aim at shop-girls, women, the pretence, the vulgarity of life (because I love it) shoots at you as I throw – catch it – my poem.⁹⁹

Neville remarks on the pretence of his interactions with women, and aims the truth of his sexuality, written into poetry and offered to Bernard before leaving the room. He later laments upon leaving school that “[society] will make it impossible for me to always read Catullus.”¹⁰⁰

Neville’s reading of Catullus informs his ‘historical sense’, which locates his sexuality within a shared past that spans millennia, a past that remains active in his present; this past becomes a means to articulate his contemporary condition of queerness.

While Neville’s sexuality causes him to feel marginalised in society, it is Louis’ Australian accent that sets him apart from his English counterparts:

Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. Yet I am not included. If I speak, imitating their accent, they prick their ears, waiting for me to speak again, in order that they may place me – if I come from Canada or Australia, I, who desire above all things to be taken to the arms with love, am alien, external.¹⁰¹

Louis is the son of a colonialist, a banker in Brisbane, but was educated in England, making him both English and Australian. According to Bruce Moore, “towards the end of the nineteenth century there is a growing awareness that there is such a thing as ‘Australian English’. It is recorded in dictionaries, it is widely used by Australian writers, and it is

⁹⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 61

⁹⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 65

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 52

¹⁰¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p.70

vigorously discussed in newspapers such as the *Bulletin*.¹⁰² The recognition of the Australian accent was met with a dominantly negative response. In England, an ideal standard of pronunciation – ‘Received Pronunciation’ – had been developed to regulate the English language, impressing a particular class accent as the best of all possible sounds, and which had, due to colonial enterprise and globalisation, been exposed to and altered by myriad pronunciations. The acceptance of the English standard of pronunciation was part of a larger acceptance of the ideals of Empire as a unifying national ideology for a certain class of English person.¹⁰³ Although Louis has spent a majority of his life in England – from childhood onwards – his accent betrays him as a foreigner, bringing with it a set of assumptions as to his ‘Englishness’.

In order to level the linguistic playing ground in which he finds himself marginalized, Louis sees the languages of Antiquity as languages that he can share with those who speak ‘standard’ English. Woolf, who could read and write in ancient Greek, notes in ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ that in studying ancient Greek, “we do not know how the words sounded, or precisely where to laugh, or how the actors acted, and between this foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but tremendous breach of tradition.” Woolf writes that because of this, “Greek literature is the impersonal literature.”¹⁰⁴ Louis affirms the impersonal nature of Greek literature when he states,

I am now a boy only with a colonial accent holding my knuckles against Mr Wickham’s grained oak door. The day has been full of ignominies and triumphs concealed from fear of laughter. I am the best scholar in the school. But when darkness comes I put off this unenviable body – my large nose, my thin lips, my colonial accent – and inhabit space. I am then Virgil’s companion, and Plato’s.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Moore, B., *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xi

¹⁰³ ¹⁰³ Moore, B., *Speaking Our Language: The Story of Australian English*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. xi-xii

¹⁰⁴ Woolf, V., ‘On Not Knowing Greek’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 32

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 38

The accent becomes irrelevant in the study of Greek as the ancient Greek accent is unknown to the contemporary reader, allowing Louis a way into the world, one predicated on the impersonality, the social distance, that classical poetry provides. Unlike the disdain for the foreign culture and accent of Australia, the poetry of antiquity remains relevant despite the cultural and traditional differences between the ancients and contemporary Englishmen.

Louis' 'historical sense' consists of an affinity not only with the traditional and cultural divide between the ancients and the English, but also with Eliot's conception that the 'historical sense' and poetry enable one to access the 'visible and sensible world.' In his adolescence Louis imagines that he will become a poet. In doing so he envisages his acceptance into British history and tradition:

But we have forged certain links. Above all, we have inherited traditions. These stone flags have been worn for six hundred years. On these walls are inscribed the names of men of war, of statesmen, of some unhappy poets (mine shall be among them). Blessings be on all traditions, on all safeguards and circumscriptions!¹⁰⁶

Louis assigns the place of the 'unhappy poets' among statesmen and men of war. In doing so he marks three ways that one might be remembered and glorified in English society: literary excellence, war and politics. For Louis, traditions are markers of Englishness that he can access and assimilate thereby inserting himself into British history. He further asserts his 'historical sense' when leaving school when he remarks that

This is the first day of a new life [...] I force myself to state, if only in one line of unwritten poetry, this moment; to mark this inch in the long-long history that began in Egypt, in the time of the Pharaohs, when women carried red pitchers to the Nile. I seem already to have lived many thousand years. But if I now shut my eyes, if I fail to realize the meeting-place of past and present, that I sit in a third-class railway carriage full of boys going home for the holidays, human history is defrauded of a moment's vision.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 42

¹⁰⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 48

Louis locates his poetry, and the moment that it captures within a larger historical narrative. He recognises the moment as ‘the meeting place of past and present’ while also noting the fleetingness of time and the temporal instability of the written word. As such both Neville and Louis’ ‘historical sense’, as it develops in relation to classical poetry also suggests something crucial about the progression of literature through history.

Bakhtin asserts that ‘real historical time’ is not only confined to the time-space of a work’s narrative content, but also to the progression and reception of a literary work as it changes through time:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. Of course this process of change is itself chronotopic: it occurs first and foremost in the historically developing social world, but without ever losing contact with changing historical space. We might even speak of a special *creative* chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work.¹⁰⁸

The deliberate inclusion of both readers *and* listeners in this process is linked specifically with classical poetry in the oral tradition and diegesis, a type of fictional story telling that reveals the experiences of characters through narrative. The story is recounted rather than enacted or shown. *The Waves* – narrated by six characters – is a diegetic ‘novel of emergence’. By including classical poetry in Neville and Louis’ cultural education, Woolf also reworks and re-contextualises these canonical texts. Bakhtin suggests here that a work is recreated and enriched through the reception of the reader or listener, who in identifying points of contact between the ‘historical work’ and the contemporary moment, bridges the gap between the past and the present. When Louis states that he seems to ‘have lived for thousands of years’ and that by closing his eyes, ‘history is defrauded of a moment’s vision’, which he feels the need to

¹⁰⁸ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 254

record 'in one line of poetry', he identifies the dialectical relationship between past and present, literary work and material reality and interpretive processes of reading and writing.

Although both Neville and Louis read classical poetry, their interpretations of it are also subjective. Each recreates the work within a context specific to his experience of twentieth-century British society. Indeed, Louis' struggle to develop his identity as a foreigner living in England, and Neville's struggle to formulate his sexual identity is also the struggle to renegotiate the terms that constitute the ideal 'Englishman'. Anne Hartree writes that "Englishness' is a complex and somewhat slippery notion. In general terms national identities may be understood as constructed through a process of inclusion and exclusion, in which certain groups and the characteristics and values associated with them come to stand for the nation as a whole at the expense of other groups, who are either placed outside, or 'rewritten' and defined as secondary as the price of their inclusion."¹⁰⁹ The ideal Englishman was native to Britain, white, masculine, a husband, a statesman and a patriot. Neither Louis nor Neville marries, and while both enter into civil service as a shipping executive and scholar respectively, both live lives of relative seclusion and exclusion from broader society. They are both outsiders to the ideal in different ways.

Poetry becomes for them a link to a collective past, a form of unity that they imagine will make sense of the present. Woolf employs the metaphor of the 'steel ring' that Louis and Neville imagine will 'unite' and 'fix into words' the surrounding world to contribute to a larger thematic in *The Waves* of unity and disunity. Both Neville and Louis describe poetry using the metaphor of the 'steel ring': Neville wants "to make a steel ring of clear poetry that shall connect the gulls and the women with bad teeth, the church spire and the bobbing billycock hats as I see them when I take my luncheon and prop my poet – is it Lucretius? – against a

¹⁰⁹ Hartree, A., 'A passion that few English minds have admitted': Homosexuality and Englishness in E.M. Forster's "Maurice"', *Paragraph*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1996, p. 129

cruet and the gravy-splashed bill of fare.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Louis often states that he will “assemble a few words and forge round us a hammered ring of beaten steel.”¹¹¹ What he experiences fleetingly during the day he will “try to-night to fix in words, to forge in a ring of steel.”¹¹² The book of poetry that he reads while at university “contains some forged rings, some perfect statements, a few words, but poetry.”¹¹³ Foremost, the steel rings allude to chiasmic structure, also called ‘ring composition’, a mode of representation popular in classical poetry, especially the epic. Ring composition is “a [...] design in which the last element in a series in some way echoes the first, the next to the last the second, and so on. Often the series centres on a single kernel, which may serve as the key element, so that the design as a whole may be thought of as an ABC ... X... CBA pattern capable of indefinite expansion.”¹¹⁴ Poetry becomes metaphorical of the interrelation between present and past, which both Neville and Louis see as connected, as circular, and with the potential for ‘indefinite expansion.’ This is echoed in the poetic prose that foregrounds each stage of development for the six characters in *The Waves*: “The sun had not yet risen/The sun rose higher/ The sun rose/The sun, risen/ The sun had risen to its full height/ The sun no longer stood in the middle of the sky/The sun had sunk lower in the sky/The sun was sinking/Now the sun had sunk”. The ‘single kernel’ in this progression is the sun, which rises and sinks, the pattern of which could be repeated indefinitely and points to the earth circling the sun. Furthermore, ring-composition combined with the natural imagery at the start of each section contributes to the impression of cyclical time in the chronotope of *The Waves*. According to Bakhtin, “time reveals itself above all in nature: the movement of the sun and stars, the crowing of roosters, sensory and visual signs of the time of year. All of these are inseparably linked to corresponding moments in human life, existence

¹¹⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p.96

¹¹¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 128

¹¹² Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 28

¹¹³ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p.70

¹¹⁴ Niles, J.D., ‘Ring Composition and the Structure of Beowulf’, *PMLA*, vol. 94, no. 5, 1979, p. 924

and activity (labour) – the cycles of time that are marked by degrees and intensity of labour.”¹¹⁵ The poetic prose at the start of each section captures the cyclical nature of time – the sun rises and sets signalling the start and end of days and the earth rotates around the sun with each full cycle completing a year – while the narrated sections of the novel depict the ‘existence and activity’ of the six characters in their daily lives.

Moreover, the ‘steel rings’ (and the constant references to antiquity that accompany them) can also allude to the dialogue between Socrates and Ion in Plato’s *Ion*. Woolf believed that “in [Plato’s] dialogues we are made to seek truth with every part of us [...] it is his art which plays upon us in as many ways at once and brings us to an exultation of mind which can only be reached when all powers are called upon to contribute their energy to the whole.”¹¹⁶ The ‘energy of the whole’, in this sense, is compatible with Greek notions of the relation between interiority and exteriority and the relation of both to ‘real historical time’. Bakhtin identifies the first instances of ‘real historical time’ as existing in the pre-novelistic biographical forms that provide the prototype of cyclical time in their depiction of “an individual who passes through the course of a whole life.”¹¹⁷ He cites Plato’s work as an example of literature that represents a (classical Greek) state in which notions of interiority and exteriority are not viewed as separate from each other.¹¹⁸ The subject is therefore a part of the world and the world is a part of the subject, and as such, the subject is part of history and history is part of the subject. Bakhtin writes that, “our ‘internal’ was, for the Greek’s conception of man, laid out on the same axis as our ‘external,’ that is, it was just as visible and audible and it existed on the surface, for others as well as for oneself. Therefore, all aspects of the human

¹¹⁵ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 25

¹¹⁶ Woolf, V., ‘On Not Knowing Greek’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 42

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 130

¹¹⁸ Pechey, G., *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Word in the World*, New York, Routledge, 2007 p. 89

image were related to one another.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the ‘exteriority’ of the individual did not inhabit ‘empty space’ but formed part of an “organic human collective.”¹²⁰ The individual is, in effect, “open on all sides”, as exemplified in the unqualified publicity of the Agorá (Ἀγορά: a central meeting place in ancient Greek city-states), which brought together artistic, spiritual and political life.¹²¹

This is no more evident than in *Ion*, which describes the chain of inspiration and the community of muse, artist and rhapsode who ‘contribute their energy to the whole’ in the act of artistic creation, projected into the public realm. In this dialogue, Ion claims that, as a rhapsode, he possesses an art. His art, however is limited to Homer and omits other epic poets. Socrates identifies the omission of other poets from Ion’s art as way to introduce the idea that Ion possesses neither art nor knowledge. In order for Ion to possess art, he must receive art as a whole. To receive art is to be able to identify who speaks well or badly about the subject matter of art. If Ion had an art he would be equally skilled in interpreting the art of other epic poets as he is at interpreting Homer.¹²² Ion’s ability to interpret Homer without art or knowledge is described by Socrates when he says:

I do see, Ion, and I'm going show you what I think it is. For your speaking well about Homer is not an art, as I was just saying, but a divine power which moves you like the stone which Euripides called Magnet, but most people call Heracleon. In fact, this stone not only attracts iron rings but also puts power in the rings so that they also have power to do the same thing the stone does and attract other rings. Sometimes quite a long chain of iron rings hangs suspended one from another; but they're all suspended by the power derived from that stone.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 135

¹²⁰ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 135

¹²¹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 132

¹²² Allen, R., ‘Comment (Ion), Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R.E. Allen, London, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 4

¹²³ Plato, ‘Ion’, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R.E. Allen, London, Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 13-14

The Heracleian stone (a magnet) used by Plato operates as a metaphor for the interplay between the muses and the poet. The poet is the messenger or interpreter of the muse. The poet is described here as an iron ring that is attracted to the magnetic power (inspiration) of the muse.¹²⁴ The ‘steel rings of poetry’ described by Neville and Louis suggest the ‘iron rings’ that hang suspended in Socrates’ description of the relation between the poets and the muses as well as the structural rings that provide the framework for epic poems like *The Iliad*. In Greek mythology, the muses were considered to be the source of inspiration for, and personification of, science and the arts and more specifically literature, dance and music. Bernard sets up the relation between the art of poetry and the inspiration of the muses when he states: “I see Louis, stonecarved, 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.”¹²⁵ Louis and Neville are described here in terms of sculpture: solid unyielding form and metallic, sharp precision again possibly alluding to the steel and stone of Plato’s metaphor. In contrast to this Susan, Jinny and Rhoda are described using natural elements. Susan whose eyes are ‘lumps of crystal’ is likened to earth, Jinny to fire and Rhoda to water.

If Neville and Louis are the poets, then Jinny, Susan and Rhoda represent the muses, who in mythology were often likened to water-nymphs, fountains and nature more broadly. This nature/muse theme continues throughout the narrative as the natural elements associated with Woolf’s female characters are combined with the sensational and the imaginative, making them at times ethereal. Furthermore, all three embody an art form. Jinny is closely associated

¹²⁴ *Ion* follows and expands on ideas originating in Plato’s *Apology*. In the *Apology*, Socrates goes to the poets and questions them. He finds that although they are reputed to be wise, they are unable to describe their work. Socrates deduces that wisdom plays no part in the composition of poetry. Rather poets have a natural and divine disposition (not unlike seers or prophets). In *Ion*, Ion is not a poet but a rhapsode. He relays the work of the poets to large audiences. Ion’s belief that he ‘possesses an art’ is challenged by Socrates who argues that Ion is simply one link in the chain of inspiration, thereby negating any individualist tendencies in Ion’s conception of his role in broader society. See: R.E. Allen, ‘Comment’, Plato, ‘Ion’, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R.E. Allen, London, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 3

¹²⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 87

with dance and music: “I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth; I move, I dance; I never cease to move and to dance.”¹²⁶ Susan is “born to be the adored of poets” with that “unemphatic beauty of pure style which those who create poetry so particularly admire.”¹²⁷ Rhoda, however, is not confined to one specific art form, but embodies all of them through her association with water: “I shift and change and am seen through in a second.”¹²⁸ The ancient Greeks believed that the arts were closely associated with water. As Everson puts it, “The language of muse inspiration works with associations of moisture and creativity, of well springs, of flow, of flooding, of the ebb, with ‘drying up’.”¹²⁹ Gaston Bachelard identifies connections between the muses, water and spoken words. He describes the human language of ancient poetry as having a “liquid quality, a flow in its overall effect, water in its consonants.”¹³⁰ The intertextual incorporation of Plato’s metaphor in *The Waves* provides Woolf with a means of unifying her characters in a single, although never ending, act of creation; she chains them together in an aesthetic circuit. Plato writes that the chain of inspiration is infinite: “As though from that stone there is suspended a great chain of choral dancers and directors and assistants; they’re suspended sideways from the rings hanging down from the Muses.”¹³¹ Indeed if Louis and Neville stand in for the poets and Susan, Jinny and Rhoda are the muses, then it follows that Bernard – who is accorded the final soliloquy in the novel – becomes through the chain of inspiration, the rhapsode.

In Plato’s metaphor, the poet is the messenger of the muse, which is akin to Eliot’s vision of the poet in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ since the poet functions as a conduit for a chemical reaction, just as the poet communicates the muse’s message. A further link in the chain of inspiration identifies the rhapsode as the messenger of the poet (the messenger of

¹²⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 30

¹²⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 190-191

¹²⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 31

¹²⁹ Everson Borofka, D., *Memory, Muses, Memoirs*, Bloomington, iUniverse, 2010, p. 64

¹³⁰ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Pegasus, Dallas, 1983, p.15

¹³¹ Plato, ‘Ion’, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R.E. Allen, London, Yale University Press, 1996, p.15

the messenger).¹³² A rhapsode typically recites epic poetry. Translated literally, ῥαψῳδός (rhapsōdos) means ‘stitching singer’ or ‘one who stitches/ weaves songs together’. The definition of the rhapsode as one who stitches songs together resonates with the musicality that permeates *The Waves*. Indeed, even the poetry that Woolf references contains a musical element in its performance. A rhapsode would sing the epic poetry of the Greek poets, a task that involved skill in both rhythm and memory. Bernard’s final soliloquy interweaves his memories and the memories of his friends with an external and sensational experience of the modernising world, a juxtaposition of sound, sight and feeling that unifies, that brings everything narratively full circle. In this way, he is typical of the hero in the *Bildungsroman* as a ‘novel of emergence’ in that his development takes place,

against the background of these times of nature, daily existence, and life, which are all cyclical to one degree or another [and] interwoven with signs of historical time – essential traces of human hands and minds that change nature, and the way human reality and all man has created are reflected back on his customs and views.¹³³

However, before we can appreciate the full extent of Bernard’s task in ‘summing up’ the complex aesthetics of *The Waves*, it is necessary to first understand the role that sight, sound and sensation play in the text as a whole, and especially in enhancing the ‘cyclical time’ characteristic of this particular *Bildungsroman* form.

Beethoven and *The Waves*

The industrial age intervened in the landscape of twentieth-century Europe by introducing new sights, sounds and sensations to the experience of everyday life. Theodore Adorno writes in *Composing for Films* (1947), that in the modern age:

¹³² Allen, R., ‘Comment (Ion), Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. R.E. Allen, London, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 5

¹³³ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 32

The human ear has not adapted itself to the [...] highly industrialised order as readily as the eye, which has become accustomed to conceiving reality as made up of separate things, commodities, objects that can be modified by practical activity. Ordinary listening, as compared to seeing, is 'archaic'; it has not kept pace with technological progress. One might say that to react with the ear, which is fundamentally a passive organ in contrast to the swiftly, actively selecting eye, is in a sense not in keeping with the present advanced industrial age and its cultural anthropology. For this reason acoustical perception preserves comparably more traits of long bygone, pre-individualistic collectivities than optical perception.¹³⁴

Sight, in Adorno's formulation, is the more modern mode of perception, especially in contrast with the ear and its links to 'pre-individualistic collectivities' from a 'bygone' era. He describes sound as 'archaic'. Archaism for Adorno refers to the historical developments that set a work of art apart from our aesthetic but not our intellectual appreciation. In other words, the 'archaic' is that which is historically outside of our contemporary aesthetic moment but nevertheless accessible through the intellect via historicisation. The archaic allows us to perceive that aesthetic experience is "an historical phenomenon, in which a contemporaneous artwork autonomously expressing social reality provides the historically situated individual with a critical experience of that reality."¹³⁵ Sight or seeing keeps pace with the contemporary moment as it is directly relative to the moment of the image. The image occurs, or rather comes into being, at the same moment that it is seen and thus interpreted. The eye sees 'selectively' because it can focus on one image and only one image-interpretation at a time. Conversely, sound and hearing, as a 'passive sense', is exposed to myriad sound-sensations at any one point. For example, a busy street cannot be divided selectively by the listener into its individual sound-components (a car, a person talking, the sound of footfall, birds in a neighbouring park), but is experienced as a total sound-experience that combines the modern industrial (cars, trams,

¹³⁴ Adorno, T. & Eisler, H., *Composing for Films*, London, Athlone Press, (1947) 1994, p. 21

¹³⁵ O'Connor, B., *Adorno*, New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 183

trains, clocks) with the organic sounds that pre-existed the industrial age (birds, people, footfall).

In order to activate the senses in a reader, Woolf incorporates music into the very structure of the text. The first instance of music in the text involves the incorporation of the structure and rhythm of Beethoven's *Opus 130*, evident in the poetic prose at the start of the novel, which shares striking structural similarities with the opening bars of the first movement of *Opus 130*, 'Adagio ma non troppo' (See Appendix 2). *Opus 130* begins with the first and second violin, the viola and the cello playing a single note in four part harmony. The sound is neutral as the four instruments are indistinguishable from each other in the same way that in the opening lines of *The Waves* 'the sea is indistinguishable from the sky'. The description of the sea as indistinguishable from the sky is followed by a conjunction (except), the adverbial phrase 'that the sea was slightly creased' and a simile 'as if a cloth had wrinkles in it'. The conjunction negates the first statement (sea and sky are indistinguishable) by introducing the simile (the sea is creased like a cloth). The conjunction/simile negation echoes a disruption in the music progression by the first violin as it separates from the neutrality of the opening phrase to gently, slowly, alternate between rising in a clear, clean melody above and merging with the steady, low rhythm sustained by the second violin, the viola and the cello.

The links between the adagio and the text only become firmer as we read further into the novel's opening. Like the 'grey cloth [that becomes] barred with thick strokes moving, one after the another', the four instrumental voices of *Opus 130* gradually gain tempo as they rise, fall and follow each other. Each instrument lifts and releases the melody perpetually, eventually culminating in a break, a pause. The 'thick strokes moving', following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually in the poetic prose infer the rhythmic urgency of the crescendo through the use of gerunds (moving, following, pursuing) alongside assonance (another, other) which phonetically imitates the sound of waves as they rise, fall and heap themselves, breaking

against the shore before ‘pausing’ – an action uncharacteristic of a wave, but in keeping with the structure of *Opus 130*.

Following this pause, Woolf describes the ‘unconscious breath of a sleeper’. The in-out rhythm of breathing mirrors in Beethoven’s composition the solo voice of the cello that follows the pause, playing a single, repetitive note that culminates in a melody that is picked up two bars later by the second violin before it is complemented by the viola and finally the first violin. The crescendo builds again, echoed in the poetic prose by the ‘raised lamp’ and the ‘flat bars of white, green and yellow’ that ‘spread across the sky like the blades of a fan’. The fan opens and spreads across the sky in the same way that the melody grows in texture and volume as the viola, violins and cello alternate between concord and discord.

Another pause in the movement of the melody is followed by a lively, fast progression taken up by the first violin and played in a way that is not smooth and flowing but rugged and stopped with no slurred effect on the note. Woolf’s text imitates this effect, again using assonance. The ‘fibrous, flickering, flaming fibres’ in the description of the sunrise create a phonetically clipped effect mimetic of the rugged and stopped progression of the first violin. In the poetic prose: ‘Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire fuse into one haze, one incandescence’. This mirrors the viola, second violin and cello in *Opus 130* that gradually re-emerge to join and complement the galloping melody carried by the first violin, which builds in tension and speed, lifts the melody like the ‘weight of the woollen grey sky’, before it culminates in three short, high notes played in harmony.

Woolf’s juxtaposition of Beethoven’s sonata with the prose at the start of *The Waves* allows the text to transcend the limitations of language to include sonic stimuli, thereby expanding the sensory plane of the novel. By adapting Beethoven’s sonata as text, Woolf challenges the limitations of language; she introduces the idea that language is not confined to linguistic signs and speech. Rather discourse can take place between the senses and more

specifically between sight and sound. The musical rhythm of Beethoven's sonata in the opening poetic prose alters the form and content of the text evident in the waves that rise, fall and uncharacteristically pause; this combination of sound with language is part of Woolf's experimental project to capture all the buzz of reality.

On a more fundamental level, Woolf deviates from traditional novelistic form by merging music formula and literary prose, not only in poetic prose analysed above but also in the structure of *The Waves* as a whole. The first movement of *Opus 130* is in sonata-form, yet, as is characteristic especially of Beethoven's late work, it plays with structure by altering convention. Beethoven breaks away from the conventional style – established in the work of Haydn and Mozart – by opening the movement with a dramatic chorale that resists resolution to the core key of B-flat major. Furthermore, Beethoven defies the structure of the string quartet form by adding a fifth and sixth movement to the traditional four, and by experimenting with the order of the movements of the classical string quartet format derived from the Baroque suite¹³⁶. He inserts a frantic *Presto* movement before the traditionally second-in-line slow movement, and a song-like *Cavatina* before the final movement, which in turn does not conform to the traditional variation/rondo-based finale, but instead develops the main theme in a fugue-like manner. Each movement forms a unique but integrated part of the whole, whose unity is emphasised by a close relation and logical progression of key signatures as well as a fundamental kinship between the main themes. The unconventional unity of disunity that this piece embodies would have appealed to Woolf aesthetically, and is arguably manifest in the unity and disunity of the six characters in *The Waves*.

Like Beethoven, Woolf resists traditional structure in *The Waves*. She removes novelistic supports such as plot and setting, choosing to confine the narrative to the singular

¹³⁶ Clements, E., 'Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf's "The Waves"'. *Narrative*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005, p. 165

dialogues of her six speaking characters. The six characters in the novel use direct speech to narrate their experiences. Although they do not engage each other explicitly, as with the movements in Beethoven's sonata, each character forms a unique but integrated part of the whole. This becomes evident in the very first lines of the spoken narrative:

'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.'

'I see a globe,' said Neville, 'hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.'

'I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny, 'twisted with gold threads.'

'I hear something stamping,' said Louis. 'A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.'¹³⁷

The six do not speak to or about the other but assert their singularity through the personal pronoun 'I', then through the description of a sensory experience: sight or sound respectively. In spite of the separateness of their statements, the six are unified through language. Each statement follows a typical subject-verb-object order. Moreover, these six statements follow the same structure as the movements in a sonata: exposition – development – recapitulation. The exposition presents the initial material of the movement: 'I see a ring'/ 'I see a slab of pale yellow'/ 'I hear a sound'/ 'I see a globe'/ 'I see a crimson tassel'/ 'I hear something stamping'. The combination of sight or sound (I see, I hear) is followed by the material assigned to the respective sense. The speaker (subject) introduces the sense/ action (verb), which introduces the initial material (object). The development follows the exposition: 'hanging above me'/ 'spreading away'/ 'cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp'/ 'hanging down in a drop'/ 'twisted'/ 'a great beast's foot is chained'. The development is the process whereby the initial material introduced by the exposition is transformed. The 'ring' that Bernard 'sees' is 'hanging above him'. The

¹³⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p.5

initial material, 'the ring' develops into a 'ring that hangs'; Jinny sees a crimson tassel, which develops into a twisted crimson tassel. Rhoda hears a sound, which develops into an onomatopoeic clarification of the sound.

The development is followed by the recapitulation which echoes earlier themes and completes the cyclical progression of the phrase: 'It quivers and hangs in a loop of light'/'until it meets a purple stripe'/'going up and down'/'against the enormous flanks of some hill.'/'with gold threads'/'it stamps, and stamps, and stamps'. The recapitulation refers back to primary themes from the exposition. In the exposition, Bernard's main theme is the 'ring'. In the recapitulation, the 'loop' refers back to the 'ring'; Susan's 'slab of pale yellow' is referenced by the 'purple stripe'; Louis hears something stamping, referenced in the recapitulation by the repetitive 'stamps, stamps, stamps'.

In this way the audible and inaudible are integrated, which further highlights Woolf's investment in interweaving sound into the text in a way that, for her, captures the ebb and flow of the real in the stream of time. According to Sam Halliday, "Woolf conceives a 'total' or inclusive 'sound-world' where the sonic and the non-sonic, and the musical and non-musical, occupy a common space: a space, moreover, that is as much social as it is geophysical, as much conceptual as it is sensory, and as much imaginary, or subjective, as it is 'real'."¹³⁸ Woolf uses music to explore a recurrent thematic in *The Waves* of unity and dissolution. Metaphorically, the separateness of the instruments, movements and phases in a piece of music is combined in the sonata as a whole, in the same way that her separate characters and sections combine to form the complete novel. Clements writes that, "her thematic and structural material emulates simultaneous separation and correlation, as does musical counterpoint."¹³⁹ Furthermore, the

¹³⁸ Halliday, S., *Sonic Modernity: representing sound in literature, culture and the arts*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 12

¹³⁹ Clements, E., 'Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, Narrative, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2005, p. 164

combination of sonic and non-sonic sensation not only transcends the limits of literary form, but also fulfils the project of capturing myriad sensations to give the impression of the whole, the “incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday”, her claim to how reality should be represented.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, the unity of the six is sustained by the shared experience of a chronological progression, in ‘cyclical time’, of the day-to-day in life from childhood to old age. Despite this, throughout the narrative, each character attempts to individuate him- or herself from the group, thus resisting resolution, a resistance that ultimately fails. This failure occurs because, as Jane Goldman argues: “to talk of separate people in *The Waves* is perhaps to miss the point”.¹⁴¹ Although the six speaking characters in the novel have different names, genders, sexualities and other signifying attributes, they are ultimately intrinsically linked. In their independent soliloquys, they reference each other’s phrases and repeat each other’s experiences, even those narrated in locations independent of other characters. Bernard affirms that, “Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of 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 Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt.”¹⁴² Bernard’s narration of his friends’ experiences as his own is significant here as it takes place in the final section of the novel. In order to conclude *The Waves*, Woolf solves the separateness of her characters’ direct speech narratives by absorbing five of the six voices. Like the *fugue* that concludes *Opus 130*, she deviates from the structure of the previous sections. Until now, each stage of life is narrated by all of the characters in turn. In the final section Bernard assumes the dominant voice and the task of ‘summing up’ his life and the lives of his friends. He

¹⁴⁰ Woolf, V. ‘Modern Fiction (1919)’, quoted in: E. Warner, *Virginia Woolf The Waves*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 8-9

¹⁴¹ Goldman, J., *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 186

¹⁴² Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p.222

becomes the rhapsode, stitching together six lives (songs) so as to achieve the effect of the whole.

Music and Community

Beethoven's *Opus 130* and *The Waves* share a formal resemblance, not only in structure, but also in both composer and writer's deviation from musical and literary convention respectively. *Opus 130* has two alternate endings. The original final movement, *Große Fuge* – a discordant, difficult, and in many ways, thoroughly modern movement – was ill received by Beethoven's publisher who insisted that it be removed from *Opus 130*. At the encouragement of his publisher, Beethoven replaced the original final movement with *Finale: Allegro*: a seamless, cheerful and more importantly listenable sonata-rondo that would complement the five preceding movements, and that would be more appealing to a listening audience. Undeniably, the alternate endings produce significantly different effects as each references disparate elements of the preceding five movements. While *Finale Allegro* complements the harmony and melody of the preceding movements, *Große Fuge* draws not only on the harmony of these movements, but also on the uneasiness of the discordant elements that permeate and unsettle the sonata as a whole. It is a work of extremes that dominates the sonata by straining against the limits of concord and discord.

Similarly, in *The Waves* Woolf compares two novel forms, the 'novel of ordeal' and the 'novel of emergence' through two exceptionally different characters: Percival and Bernard. Like the *Finale: Allegro* which seems to give unity and cohesion to *Opus 130* but in reality provides a 'false ending', Percival provides the six characters in the novel with a false sense of unity derived from his associations with empire and imperialism. Conversely, Bernard, who progresses within the cyclical 'real historical time' of the *The Waves*, emerges and develops a subjectivity in correspondence with a surrounding world that is dynamic in both time and space (a space expanded to include sonic and non-sonic sensation). The cyclical structure of *The*

Waves ensures that in old-age, Bernard is able to look back and review the events of his life and the lives of his friends critically and in relation to his own. Like the *Große Fuge* in Beethoven's sonata, Bernard combines both the harmonious moments and the moments of discord and unpleasantness to obtain a sense of 'the whole.'

Indeed, in his final soliloquy Bernard is able to look back on the happy, painful, and embarrassing moments from childhood to maturity – moments which he often associates with music. In one such instance, Bernard recalls his attempts when young to write a love letter in the style of George Gordon, Lord Byron: "Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting-song, Percival's music; but a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song to replace these flagging, foolish transcripts – how much too deliberate! how much too reasonable! – which attempt to describe the flying moment of first love."¹⁴³ Bernard draws attention here to the failure of a style that is not his own and not contemporary to his experiences, to capture an expression of his love. He also draws attention to the inadequacy of Percival's 'wild hunting song', which is another way of describing music traditionally written in the key of B flat and scored in 4/4 time, to describe the shame and failures of youth.

The comparison that Bernard makes between the 'painful, guttural, visceral' music of lived experience and Percival's 'wild hunting song' recalls the disparity between lived material reality and the idea of empire. In an essay titled 'Thunder at Wembley' (1924), Woolf writes about the Wembley British Empire Exhibition of 1924-5, which she describes as "the minarets and pagodas of our possessions in the East."¹⁴⁴ The British composer of the Empire, Sir Edward Elgar, wrote the *Imperial March* for the event, which was designed to convince the British public of the legitimacy of the imperial project. Francoise Carter asserts that the "Empire March and Pageant of Empire songs" were designed to "sell the Empire to the British public and to

¹⁴³ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 192

¹⁴⁴ Woolf, V., 'Thunder at Wembley', A. McNeillie (ed.) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, London, Hogarth Press, 1988, p. 412

advertise to the world that the most powerful agency of civilisation had its heart set upon peaceful actions and the good of mankind.”¹⁴⁵ The March, written in B flat major and scored in 4/4 time, follows the structure of a military song. This presupposes a correlation between music and national ideology – a national ideology aimed specifically at British youth. The secretary of state for the colonies – the Duke of Devonshire – was reported in *The Times* asserting that “He considered all the present symptoms most promising [...] An immense number of children were being imbued with something of the Imperial spirit”. Moreover he claimed that “Greater than trade or commerce was the Imperial idea which underlay the whole Exhibition.”¹⁴⁶ The idea of imperialism was aimed at the youth of England with the intent to instil a sense of patriotism and devotion to the British Empire. In *The Waves*, Bernard identifies the amenability of the young to romantic and heroic ideas when he describes the ‘flagging, foolish transcripts’ written in the style of Byron when he was young. When he compares ‘painful, guttural, visceral’ music to Percival’s hunting song, he also sets up a complex comparison between the failures and emotional turmoil of lived experience and the imagined heroism and national unity of empire, both of which he locates within the experience of youth. Like the imagined persona of Byron that fails to capture the subjective sensations of first love, national ideology fails to capture the reality of lived experience. In ‘Thunder at Wembley’ Woolf describes the falsity of the imperial idea when she writes:

A rushing sound is heard. Is it the wind, or is it the British Empire exhibition? It is both. The wind is rising and shuffling along the avenues; the Massed Bands of Empire are assembling and marching to the Stadium [...] Admirably impassive, the bands of Empire march on [...] Colonies are perishing and dispersing in spray of inconceivable beauty and terror which some malignant power illuminates [...] Out in the open under a cloud of electric silver the bands of Empire strike up [...] The Empire is perishing; the bands are playing; the Exhibition is in ruins.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Carter, F., ‘Bernard’s notebooks: Language and narrative in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*’, *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies I*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2002, p. 86

¹⁴⁶ A. McNeillie (ed.) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, London, Hogarth Press, 1988, p. 414

¹⁴⁷ Woolf, V., ‘Thunder at Wembley’, A. McNeillie (ed.) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, London, Hogarth Press, 1988, p. 413

As the colonies fall and Empire fails, the bands of empire persistently play on. The destruction of the exhibition, which serves as an analogy for the decline of the empire, is interwoven with a musical analogy that describes the ideology of empire. Woolf creates a strong, ironic contrast between the ruins of the exhibition and the continuous music, which beats home an idea that no longer corresponds with material reality. In other words, Woolf identifies the disjuncture between the ‘idea of empire’ and its formal realisation.

The idea of trying to contain meaning within a form that is alien to it further resonates with Woolf’s concerns about modern literature. In ‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’ (1927) Woolf writes that, “Nobody indeed can read much modern literature without being aware that some dissatisfaction, some difficulty, is lying in our way. On all sides writers are attempting what they cannot achieve, are forcing the form they use to contain a meaning which is strange to it.”¹⁴⁸ As we have discerned from Woolf’s essay “Modern Fiction”, she actively sought a means of literary production that would break free from what she saw as the confines of the tradition of fiction. For Woolf, rather than the preordained structures of literary method, “Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist’s intentions if we are readers.”¹⁴⁹ The dialectical exchange between reader and text that Woolf creates in *The Waves* relies on the use of compositional techniques that literature and music have in common. The music of empire, although designed to promote a particular ideology of empire, is only effective in so far as it is perceived as such by the listening public. At the same time, the perception of music works in conjunction with the event (the exhibition) to generate a particular response from an audience. In *The Waves*, music works structurally and analogously alongside the events of the novel to generate a

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, V., ‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, D. Bradshaw (ed.), *Selected Essays*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, (EBook).

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, V., ‘Modern Fiction’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938 (1925), p.151

particular reader response, and more specifically, a response that resists the imagined unity of an imperial national identity, in favour of an all-encompassing community. In this sense, Woolf's style in *The Waves* imitates music on a more fundamental level, the perception of which lies exactly in the moment of the text – of the novel or of the string quartet – being perceived by a reader or listener respectively.

The dialectical exchange between reader and text becomes most apparent in the concluding section of *The Waves*. Bernard's final soliloquy, not unlike the relationship between the *Große Fuge* and the preceding movements in Beethoven's *Opus 130*, strains against the limits of concord and discord, between his life, the lives of his friends and the reader. In the subsequent chapter, I focus solely on Bernard's final soliloquy. Drawing on the aesthetic education – music and poetry – that Woolf proposes in *The Waves*, alongside her critique of national ideology and national identity as outlined in chapter one, I will show that, unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman* form, *The Waves* is less concerned with telling the story of “the integration of a particular “I” into the “general subjectivity of a community”, than the reverse: the role of the common in the formation of a particular “I”. Furthermore, I argue that the formation of Bernard's subjectivity is reliant on a dialectical exchange between the author, the text and the reader, who progresses alongside Bernard throughout the novel, stressing the active dimension of the reader's experience of reading.

Chapter Three: Bernard's Rhapsody and the Reading Audience

Introduction

Before reaching the concluding section of *The Waves*, Woolf's readers have been presented with what appear to be six characters with six individual voices and a silent seventh character who is described throughout. In the concluding section, we are asked to rethink our experience of the novel as a whole when we are confronted with a single narration, soliloquised by Bernard. Bernard's final soliloquy serves to concretise an overarching theme of unity that has been present throughout the novel, foremost in Woolf's critique of national identity as an inadequate unifying concept and secondly in the art forms – music and poetry – that she draws on to influence the aesthetic education of her characters.

As the most eloquent of the six characters, Bernard's dialogues constitute a third of the novel's narrative. With the exception of the fifth and sixth sections, Bernard is the first to speak. His narrative opens the dialogue in *The Waves*, and he is accorded the task of concluding the narrative by providing the reader with a clarifying summary of the events of the novel and the effect of these events on the formation of his subjectivity. In keeping with Woolf's critique of the fixed forms of subject formation (such as the national ideology of empire), and of conventional literary forms, Bernard's subjectivity develops in the novel as relative to both the external sensational world and the development of a literary prose in his own style.

While Louis and Neville write poetry, Bernard is the only character in the novel who writes prose. He carries a 'book of phrases' that he uses to record situations and experiences. He writes about Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda, Louis and Percival, thereby absorbing them into his consciousness and finally into the rhapsody at the close of *The Waves*. Bernard's progression from childhood to old-age is centred largely on a negotiation of language. As a child, he notes "but when we sit together, close," [...] 'we melt into each other with phrases.

We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory.”¹⁵⁰ The ‘unsubstantial territory’ that Bernard describes early in the novel already indicates that he is unable to separate a distinct self from the other five characters in the novel. Thus, they are ‘edged with mist’ – the edges that should definitively separate them are blurred and thus crossable. Furthermore, the characters ‘melt into each other with phrases’, a self-reflexive statement that draws attention to the text as text and thus to the materiality of the text. The characters ‘melt into each other’ through the intersection of their narratives, which are written one after the other in the novel, and come together to form the whole. Together these characters form an ‘unsubstantial territory’ in that they are, without traditional novelistic supports, reduced to pure voice and internal dialogue that shifts and changes as the characters grow and the narrative progresses.

Language, which is described here as unstable, becomes for Bernard something that he must harness in his attempts to impose order on the surrounding world. Susan notes that she is “‘tied down with single words. But you [Bernard] wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher, with words and words in phrases.”¹⁵¹ Bernard ‘slips away’, and ‘rises higher’ as he becomes separated from the linguistically simple expressions of his friends towards a more complex articulation of his environment. When Bernard leaves for school he states “I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry.”¹⁵² As Bernard develops, language and writing become a means of protecting himself from, and making sense of his interactions with, the surrounding world. Unlike the garden and nursery of his childhood, the ‘clocks, housemaids and indifferent faces’ that he encounters at the train station form part of a larger society that he must navigate. He makes phrases in order to impose a narrative on the

¹⁵⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 10

¹⁵¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 10

¹⁵² Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 21

incoherence of 'newness'. In college, he makes phrases in order to keep a record of his experiences, so that he can later translate them into a larger narrative, a novel,

I note the fact for future reference with many others in my notebook. When I am grown up I shall carry a notebook – a fat book with many pages, methodically lettered. I shall enter my phrases. Under B shall come "Butterfly powder". If, in my novel, I describe the sun on the window-sill, I shall look under B and find butterfly powder. That will be useful.¹⁵³

In order for Bernard to 'write his novel', he must first collect the 'phrases' that emerge from the everyday and order them correctly. Neville notes that "We are all phrases in Bernard's story, things he writes down in his note-book under A or B."¹⁵⁴ As Bernard enters into adulthood, he attempts to shed the unstable language of his childhood in favour of the supposedly ordered and complete language of adulthood. This endeavour ultimately fails as he is forced to recognise that "there is nothing to lay hold of. I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me."¹⁵⁵ As such, in the final section, we reach chiasmus as Bernard discards his book of phrases and returns to the spoken word in his account of his life as it corresponds with the lives of his friends. Bernard must resort to a discourse of feeling and sensation in order to capture and recount the preceding events of the novel.

Bernard does not write his story into text. He gives an oral account of the events of the novel in keeping with his metaphorical role as rhapsode in the chain of inspiration as discussed in chapter two. Bernard's 'summing up', an oral account of the events of the novel, presupposes an audience to his narrative. Indeed, in the final section, in another scene set in a restaurant, Bernard speaks directly to a nameless audience whom he addresses as 'you'. I argue in this chapter, that the nameless 'you' that Bernard addresses in the closing section of the novel is undoubtedly the reader. Woolf's deviation from Bernard's personal direct-speech narrative to his direct engagement with the book's reader is a subtle but effective allusion to the genre

¹⁵³ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 26

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 51

¹⁵⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 100

designation of '*Bildungsroman*', derived from the lectures of eighteenth-century critic Karl Morgenstern, who stated that "a work will be called a *Bildungsroman* first and primarily on account of its content, because it depicts the hero's *bildung* as it begins and proceeds to a certain level of perfection, but also secondarily because, precisely by means of its depiction, it promotes the *bildung* of the reader to a greater extent than any other type of novel."¹⁵⁶ The dialectic between thematic representation (the story of an individual's education and personal growth) and aesthetic reception (the experience of the reader) assumes a relation between social integration, personal subjectivity and aesthetic education; to put it differently, the reader supposedly transforms as the character transforms. Moreover, I argue that Bernard's progression from childhood to old-age, and finally to death falls into Bakhtin's conception of the 'man in the process of becoming' typical of the *Bildungsroman* 'novel of emergence'. In this sense, the reader 'emerges' along with Bernard towards a critical and nuanced understanding of the events of the novel and finally towards an understanding of the overarching 'aesthetic' and 'educational' value of the experiences outlined in its narrative.

In what follows I argue that Bernard's direct engagement with the reader in the final section of *The Waves* explains and thus concretises Woolf's overarching critiques of empire and imperialism in the novel alongside her proposed methods – which directly oppose the ideology of imperialism – for developing a subjectivity formed in relation to the common, and the individual experience of the common as a historically and materially determined phenomenon. In the first part of my argument, I set up the conditions of Bernard's engagement with the reader by showing how, through a subtle change in the direct-speech that has characterised the narrative thus far, alongside the elimination of five of the six other voices in the novel, Bernard addresses the reader directly and invites him or her to participate in the 'summing up' of the events outlined in preceding sections. Following on from this, I show the

¹⁵⁶ Cited in Hildegard Emmel, *History of the German Novel*, trans. Ellen Summerfield (Detroit, 1984), p. 78.

ways that Bernard, having gained wisdom in old-age, is able to review the events of the past and in doing so is able to interrogate the ideological position that Percival holds in the novel in terms of his relation to the ideology of empire. Furthermore, Bernard is able to reinforce the role that the aesthetics of the novel – enhanced by Woolf’s careful incorporation of poetry and music – plays in advancing subject formation in ‘real historical time’ and in correspondence with the ‘lived reality’ of the everyday. Finally, by interrogating the dialectical relation between author, character and reader, I contend that Woolf’s adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* is a deliberate choice based on the direct correspondence that the form presupposes between the development of the protagonist and the development of the reader. Woolf saw reading as a creative and emancipatory act that contributes to the formation of an individual and fully formed subjectivity. As such, in *The Waves*, she emphasises the radical potential of reading, interpretation and creativity as an alternative to the fixed and fictional ideologies of empire and state in twentieth-century subject making practices.

Bernard and the Reader

As is typical of a hero in the ‘novel of emergence’, which documents “all those essential internal changes in a person’s nature and views that take place in him as he grows older”, Bernard’s struggle to form a ‘self’ in relation to the external world is first apparent in his schooling years.¹⁵⁷ This is evident in his tendency at this time to address himself as ‘you’:

Bernard, in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive. [...] They do not understand that I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who alternately act their parts as Bernard. [...] But *you* understand, *you*, my self, who always comes at a call [...] you understand that I am only superficially represented by what I

¹⁵⁷ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 21-22

was saying to-night. Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated.¹⁵⁸

In his formative years, Bernard experiences a ‘self’ that is not yet concretised in a solid and fully formed subjectivity. As such he addresses a self that is in essence ‘Bernard’, but that is also being worked on and altered constantly by the world around him. In this sense, he is both disparate and integrated: disparate in the multiple performative ‘Bernards’ that interact with the public, and integrated in the essential Bernard that exists in his private consciousness.

In the final section of *The Waves*, we are made aware that Bernard’s progression – and consequently our progression as readers – is drawing to a close when he is able to address a ‘you’ external to his interior ‘self’, thereby entering into discourse with the external world through a fully formed and integrated subjectivity. Bernard’s final soliloquy is set in a restaurant, a reference to the other unifying dinner scenes centred on Percival. The recurrent use of the restaurant setting informs the reader that another unifying act will occur. This time, however, only Bernard speaks, and he addresses the reader directly:

‘Now to sum up,’ said Bernard. ‘Now to explain to you the meaning of my life. Since we do not know each other (though I met you once, I think, on board a ship going to Africa), we can talk freely. The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed. This, for the moment, seems to be my life. If it were possible, I would hand it you entire. I would break it off as one breaks off a bunch of grapes. I would say, “Take it. This is my life.”¹⁵⁹

The invisible ‘you’ that Bernard addresses across a table in a restaurant never takes form, responds to, or interacts with him. The invisible ‘you’ can therefore be occupied by the reader, who, although he or she has followed Bernard’s progression through life, is effectively unknown to Bernard. Despite this, he hints at a vague sense of familiarity: ‘I met you once, I think’. The reader knows that Bernard states earlier in the text that “A journey to Rome is the limit of [his] travelling”, and he has therefore never travelled to Africa.¹⁶⁰ As such, the reader

¹⁵⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, pp. 56-57

¹⁵⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 183

¹⁶⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*. London, Penguin, 1931, p. 166

is immediately alienated from the narrative. In the preceding sections the reader has been privy to the deeply personal direct speech narratives of Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, Louis and Bernard. Now Bernard draws the reader into the immediate moment of his narrative by asking him or her to accept false information (the trip to Africa) as truth. This is preceded by ‘since we do not know each other’, which Bernard cites as a prerequisite to ‘talk freely’. Woolf includes this exchange to indicate that the relationship between the reader and Bernard has changed. Rather than a voyeuristic engagement with the ‘events of Bernard’s life’, the reader participates in hearing (and providing an audience for) Bernard’s ‘summing up of the events of a lifetime,’ which he describes as having the ‘illusion of roundness, weight and depth.’

The illusionary nature of the ordered completeness of a lifetime suggests two things about Bernard in the final section of *The Waves*. First, he is able to identify himself as a whole and complete being with a fully formed subjectivity. Second, he associates his ‘wholeness’ with the ‘ordered completeness of a lifetime’, or rather the events of his life that have contributed to his wholeness of being. The ‘roundness, weight and depth’ adhere to notions of cyclical emergence (cyclical time), “which retains a connection [...] with man’s age, trac[ing] a [...] path of man’s emergence from youthful idealism and fantasies to mature sobriety and practicality.”¹⁶¹ Bernard lays claim to these events by asserting that “what I see (this globe, full of figures) you do not see. You see me, sitting at a table opposite you, a rather heavy, elderly man, grey at the temples. You see me take my napkin and unfold it. You see me pour myself out a glass of wine. And you see behind me the door opening, and people passing.”¹⁶² Not only has Bernard achieved wholeness of being, but for the first time he describes himself as a physical being in a set location. Whereas previously in the text setting and physical

¹⁶¹ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p.22

¹⁶² Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 183

characterisation have been largely omitted from the narrative, now the reader is faced with ‘a heavy, elderly man who is greying at the temples’ and who interacts with a material environment where he ‘pours glasses of wine and folds napkins’, and she uses this self-reflexive technique – the sudden inclusion of conventional novelistic tropes – to draw the reader’s attention to the materiality of the text.

Bernard’s characterisation in the final section also corresponds with Bakhtin’s conception of the hero in a ‘novel of emergence’:

The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire *plot* significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. This type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human *emergence*. A human being can, however, emerge in quite diverse ways. Everything depends upon the degree of assimilation of real historical time.¹⁶³

‘Real historical time’ is made most evident in the final section when the narrative effectively ‘comes full circle’. The narrative is ‘retold’ by Bernard through the lens of accumulated experience gained over time, thereby setting it apart from the stream-of-consciousness first person narrations that characterise previous sections. ‘Time’ and the formation of an identity within the cyclical progression of time in *The Waves* are described by Bernard’s assertion that:

The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth. Opening and shutting, shutting and opening, with 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. How fast the stream flows from January to December! We are swept on by the torrent of things grown so familiar that they cast no shadow. We float, we float [...] Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday Tuesday. Each spreads 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.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Bakhtin, M.M., ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p.21

¹⁶⁴ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 198-201

References to, and the inclusion of rhythm in the structure of this extract, alongside Bernard's description of being and life 'growing rings' that contribute to a 'robust identity', allude to the aesthetic education – music and poetry – interwoven into the preceding sections of the novel. The rhythm of this extract, at first comprised of clipped phrases, increases in tempo as the description becomes more nuanced. This is enhanced by the repetition of phrases such as 'shutting and opening, opening and shutting' that phonetically describe the 'in and out expansion' of the 'whole being' as well as the measured ticking of a clock. The systole-diastole rhythm of life mirrors the rhythm of the waves. The 'steel rings of poetry' infer chiasmic structure, cyclical time and interconnectedness. Woolf uses poetry to advance the idea that "the poet is always our contemporary. Our being for the moment is centred and constricted, as in any violent shock of personal emotion. Afterwards, it is true, the sensation begins to spread in wider rings through our minds; remoter senses are reached; these begin to sound and to comment and we are aware of echoes and reflections."¹⁶⁵ Woolf uses the metaphor of 'rings' in *The Waves* to infer interconnectedness and also the process of interpretation and creativity. Poetry allows Woolf's characters to develop a sense of their place in history as it corresponds with the contemporary moment, while simultaneously alluding to the metaphor of the 'steel rings' in Plato's *Ion*, which unifies them in a single act of creation – the creation of a complete subjectivity – crystallised in Bernard's rhapsody.

Alongside poetry, music is woven into the very fabric of *The Waves* both structurally and metaphorically to advance the 'real historical time' of the narrative. Bernard emphasises the musicality of the text when he states, "I am so made that, while I hear one or two distinct melodies, such as Louis sings, or Neville, I am also drawn irresistibly to the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song that comes across courts

¹⁶⁵ Woolf, V., 'How to Read a Book', *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 202

at night; which we hear now booming round us as cars and omnibuses take people to theatres.”¹⁶⁶ Bernard, who describes his immersion in the everyday, is ‘so made’ by the author, Woolf, who allocates him the role of organising the events of the novel and assigning them a coherent meaning. Again, Woolf draws our attention to the materiality of the text, and the intention behind the construction of her characters. Like Bernard, the reader also only hears ‘one distinct melody’ at a time because of the fragmented, singular voices that make up the narrative. The chorus in Greek tragedy, which Bernard is drawn to, was for Woolf “the old men or women who take no active part in the drama, the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind; who can comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to his conception.”¹⁶⁷ Bernard, as rhapsode, must hear the ‘distinct melodies’ of his friends, while simultaneously engaging with the ‘chorus’, the sensational sonic and non-sonic world constructed around him, which provides ‘the other side to his – and correspondingly, the reader’s – conception’. He describes this process:

Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six 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, 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! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. With Neville, “Let’s discuss Hamlet.” With Louis, science.¹⁶⁸

The ‘sentence’ which Bernard extracts ‘whole and entire’ from the ‘cauldron’ refers to the lives of his five friends, Neville, Louis, Rhoda, Susan and Jinny. Percival is omitted from this list as a non-speaking character who does not contribute to the narration of the novel – a reference to his characterisation as an idea rather than a fully formed character. Bernard’s description of his

¹⁶⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 189

¹⁶⁷ Woolf, V., ‘On Not Knowing Greek’, *The Common Reader*, London, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 37

¹⁶⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 197

friends as ‘little fish’ references Woolf’s essay ‘The String Quartet’, where she describes a sonata performed by a string quartet as a “conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round—free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up....”¹⁶⁹ The quartet described as fish ‘leaping, splashing scraping sharp fins’ in the ‘churning boil of the current’ is reminiscent of the modern individual’s navigation of the flux and chaos of twentieth century life – the individuals who collide and disperse in a fractured society. Bernard describes his life and the lives of his friends as a ‘symphony’, with its ‘concord and discord’ thereby alluding to the music that permeates the novel in structure and content. As he and his friends grow, their experiences become more nuanced, their instruments change and they fulfil different roles in society. Nevertheless, they are joined in a single symphony and eventually in a single being.

The unity of characters is indicative of the role that the individual fulfils in community with others and moreover in a community that exists ‘in time’ and is therefore historically and materially determined. Bernard indicates this by referencing Beethoven, whose string quartet *Opus 130* is echoed by Woolf in the rhythm and structure of *The Waves*: “I went, swinging my stick, into a shop, and bought – not that I love music – a picture of Beethoven in a silver frame. Not that I love music, but because the whole of life, its masters, its adventurers, then appeared in long ranks of magnificent human beings behind me; and I was the inheritor; I, the continuer; I, the person miraculously appointed to carry it on.”¹⁷⁰ The repetition of ‘not that I love music’, indicates to the reader that music represents something in the novel other than another aesthetic form. Music in *The Waves* not only expands the sensory landscape of the novel, but also works

¹⁶⁹ Woolf, V., ‘The String Quartet’, *Monday or Tuesday, Eight Stories*, Dover Thrift, 2009 (Digireads.com Book/Digireads.com Publishing)

¹⁷⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 195

to introduce larger themes of unity and disunity and to enhance the cyclical time of the novel's chronotope. Bernard is able to identify his place within 'time' and within 'history'. Music in this sense contributes to the reader's "ability to *see time*, to *read time*, in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event – this is the ability to read in everything *signs that show time in its course*, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas (all the way to abstract concepts)."¹⁷¹ The 'abstract concepts' that Bakhtin refers to here are the 'traces of human progress' that when they appear in the chronotope of a novel provide the reader with complex "signs of historical time", or rather the "visible vestiges of man's creativity, traces of his hands and his mind: cities, streets, buildings, artworks, technology, social organisations, and so on."¹⁷² By locating himself within the 'whole of life, its masters, its adventurers' and 'magnificent human beings', Bernard marks the progression of time and of human progress as a vestige of creativity, while simultaneously referencing his role as rhapsode 'appointed to carry on' the aesthetic education (of which Beethoven forms a part) of the reader in his final speech.

Woolf's characterisation of Bernard's final soliloquy as a creative process of organising and interpreting suggests a correspondence between herself as author and Bernard as rhapsode. Woolf writes that when she conceived of the idea to write *The Waves* (then *The Moths*), she "suddenly...rhapsodised."¹⁷³ Later she writes, "I could perhaps do Bernard's soliloquy in such a way as to break up, dig deep, make prose move – yes I swear – as prose has never moved

¹⁷¹ Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 25 (Italics in the original).

¹⁷² Bakhtin, M.M., 'The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V.W. McGee, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 25

¹⁷³ Woolf, V., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell (ed.) 5 vols, vol. 3, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1983, p. 139

before: from the chuckle & the babble to the rhapsody.”¹⁷⁴ The rhapsody is introduced by Bernard’s assertion that:

...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! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper.¹⁷⁵

In order to fully capture the events of his life, Bernard must ‘tell’ the reader ‘a story’. The act of ‘telling’ rather than ‘writing’, ‘showing’ or ‘describing’ further indicates a direct engagement between character and reader. The act of ‘telling’ multiple stories – of school, love, marriage, death and so on – is mimetic of Woolf’s overall project in writing *The Waves*, as a novel that attempts to break with the conventions of literary fiction to capture the real lived experience of the everyday, of the quotidian processes of life. This is further emphasised when Bernard states that ‘we make up ridiculous, flamboyant, beautiful phrases’ to decorate ‘stories’, with phrases that ‘come down beautifully with their feet on the ground’, a sentiment that he actively rejects by noting that he is ‘tired of stories’ and ‘neat designs of life.’ By giving an oral account of his experiences, Bernard, in this sense, symbolically breaks with the novel form, an act that he furthers by seeking ‘a new language’, “some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement [...], some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably.”¹⁷⁶ By breaking with the conformity of ‘beautiful phrases’ in favour of ‘broken words, inarticulate words’, Bernard sets up the conditions of his narrative as a re-telling of the events of the preceding sections in ‘real time.’

¹⁷⁴ Woolf, V., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell (ed.) 5 vols, vol. 4, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1983, pp. 4-5

¹⁷⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 183

¹⁷⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 183

Indeed, the reader is brought to realise by degrees in the final section that the ‘untruth’ of the previous sections lies in the depiction of six seemingly individual characters. In a letter to G.L. Dickinson, Woolf writes “I did mean that in some way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one.”¹⁷⁷ Bernard affirms this by stating, “Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, Louis, Susan and myself, our life, our identity.”¹⁷⁸ And then again,

...it is not one life that I look back upon; 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. ‘So I thought that night in early autumn when we came together and dined once more at Hampton Court.’¹⁷⁹

The reference to Hampton Court alongside Bernard’s experience of unity with the other five characters is significant in that it alludes to the dinner scenes in which Percival provides a false sense of unity and conformity for the group. Bernard later describes his past experience of the dinner scenes: “This freedom, this immunity, seemed then a conquest, and stirred in me such exaltation that I sometimes go there, even now, to bring back exaltation and Percival. But it did not last.”¹⁸⁰ The description of the dinner scenes as a ‘conquest’ alludes to Percival’s association with the ‘idea of empire’, which attempted to unite the British public under a shared national identity before, during and in the aftermath of World War I. In his ‘summing up’, Bernard is able to identify the ‘fiction of empire’ as something which ‘did not – and indeed could not – last’:

But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights – elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing – that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner. While one straightens the fork so precisely on the table-cloth, a thousand faces mop and mow.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Extract from a letter written to G. L. Dickinson, cited in: D. Parsons, *Theorists of the modernist novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 77

¹⁷⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 213

¹⁷⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 212

¹⁸⁰ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 203

¹⁸¹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 196-197

Here, Bernard, describes the ‘extreme military precision, the orderly military progress’ of empire and consequently of the conformity of everyday social interaction as a ‘convenience, a lie’ and a ‘mistake’. ‘Military progress’ is a term that connotes, in the broader context of dinner scenes in *The Waves* and their thematic significance, both imperial conquest and strict social convention, which Bernard rejects. Bernard’s recourse to terms like ‘conquest’ and ‘military progress’ in his description of events pertaining to Percival resonates with the ideology of empire. According to Pericles Lewis, the “concern with the nature of consciousness in language, in particular, points to the sense that the nation shapes the individual through the national language.”¹⁸² National language, typified in the descriptions of Percival as an imperial hero in the preceding sections of the novel, works to mediate “between the apparently hostile and meaningless social world and the meaningful but powerless consciousness of the individual”¹⁸³ However, in the final section, Bernard, having emerged from his progression through life as a fully formed subject, is able to identify the fiction of ‘national ideology’ as a ‘lie’ and a ‘mistake’. Furthermore, he is able to intrude on the rigid description of social convention with images of the everyday: a ‘rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights – elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing’. Through his emergence at the close of the narrative, Bernard develops a meaningful and powerful consciousness able to order and make sense of the events of his life. As asserted by Eric Warner, “the final resource against the ravaging time turns out to be the human mind itself, its 'shaping spirit of imagination', capable of ordering and shaping life into art. This is of course the resource that Woolf herself relied on most.”¹⁸⁴ ‘Art’ in this sense, or rather, the creative potential of the human mind, is put forward by Woolf as counterpoint to

¹⁸² Lewis, P., *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 7

¹⁸³ Lewis, P., *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 4

¹⁸⁴ Warner, E., *Virginia Woolf The Waves*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.72-73

social and political ‘fictions’, constructs and conventions, those external forces that work to construct a subjectivity in correspondence with a dominant ideology.

Reading as a Redistribution of the Sensible

In *The Waves*, the creative potential of the human mind is activated by the author in writing through the character who revisits and retells, and through the reader actually reading, which foregrounds the intersections between the author, the character, and the reader, as per the norms of the *Bildungsroman*. Woolf, as author, constructs/writes *The Waves* in such a way as to challenge novelistic conventions by experimenting with literary devices such as unusual characterisation, leitmotiv and literary allusion, non-linear representation of time/real historical time, intermittent poetic prose, self-reflexivity, direct speech/stream of consciousness, symbolism, sonic and non-sonic space and so on in the fabula and syuzhet of her novel. Lewis notes that the inclusion of experimental forms and unusual narrative techniques is typical of twentieth-century authors like Woolf who, “perceiving a gap between the meaningful inner life of the individual consciousness and an outer world that shapes that inner life but seems in itself devoid of spiritual meaning” looked for a way to bridge that gap, and in doing so divine meaning from what appeared to be a senseless and incoherent outer world. Famously, modernist authors “found in art itself the means of transforming the contingencies of everyday life into a meaningful formal structure.”¹⁸⁵ For Woolf, the method of writing was subject to the understanding and ordering of the events of the everyday. Like Bernard, “who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes – phrases for the moon, notes of features; how people looked, turned, dropped their cigarette ends; under B, butterfly powder, under D, ways of naming death,” which he attempts to re-order in the final section, Woolf’s method in writing

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, P., *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 4

The Waves was a highly pressurised creative process of generating, then ordering and organising, re-ordering and re-organising her content.¹⁸⁶

For Woolf, writing *The Waves* – a novel that she describes as “opposed to the tradition of fiction” – meant that she was “casting about all the time for a rope to throw to the reader.”¹⁸⁷ The difficulty faced by Woolf in creating coherence within a ‘new form’ resonates with her preoccupation with how text is received by an unknown reading audience. Bernard touches on the instability of written language when he states “different people draw different words from me.”¹⁸⁸ Here he identifies not only the ‘different words’ that are inspired by ‘different people’, but in a more complex way, the different ways that his words are interpreted or understood by ‘different people’. Woolf, as a famously avid reader, understood the act of reading as a creative and interpretive process in and of itself, and therefore saw her role as author as one in constant conversation – in both her creative and critical work – with a potential reading audience. Apart from her novels, Woolf published over five hundred reviews and essays in numerous periodicals and two volumes of collected essays titled *The Common Reader*. According to Melba Cuddy-Keane, the vast range of readings and judgements applied by Woolf to an equally vast and varied selection of literatures “scrutinize[s] the process of reading, to locate reading in a context of historically and ideologically variable standards, and to outline a model for active, self-reflexive reading practices.” As such, “the overall impact is pedagogical and empowering: Woolf’s penetrating readings make a vast range of literature accessible, but they also offer the tools for readers to gain that access for themselves.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp. 223-224

¹⁸⁷ Woolf, V., ‘letters III: to Ethel Smyth 28 August 1930, in. N. Nicolson & J. Trautmann (eds.), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols., London, Hogarth Press, 1975-80, p. 204

¹⁸⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p. 100

¹⁸⁹ Cuddy-Keane, M., *Virginia Woolf, The Intellectual and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 1

Woolf's focus on the pedagogical and creative potential of reading suggests that the reading audience that she endeavoured to write for, and therefore the intended audience for *The Waves* as a *Bildungsroman*, was comprised of what she refers to as 'common readers'. According to Woolf, the 'common reader',

...differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole – a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing.¹⁹⁰

Woolf notes that the 'common reader' is 'worse educated' than the 'critic and the scholar'. This suggests that the 'common reader', in Woolf's view, was not someone who had received a formal or tertiary education. Woolf said of herself, "like most uneducated Englishwomen, I like reading – I like reading books in the bulk."¹⁹¹ Like Woolf, many women (represented in *The Waves* by Jinny, Susan and Rhoda) were seen as second class citizens and denied tertiary education and social mobility. Although towards the end of the nineteenth century women were entering the academy in England in unprecedented numbers, they were still largely outnumbered by their male counterparts. Furthermore, tertiary (and in some cases even secondary) education was the privilege of the upper classes. According to Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, "as industrialisation proceeded, the social stratification of society corresponded more and more to the levels of education. The established elites maintained their position by limiting access to higher education."¹⁹² Woolf addresses the hierarchical structures of class and education by advancing the idea that literacy frees the individual from the intellectual limitations imposed on him or her by these structures. In 'How To Read A Book', she writes that "to admit authorities, however heavily furred and gowned, into our libraries and let them

¹⁹⁰ Woolf, V., 'The Common Reader', *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 11

¹⁹¹ Woolf, V., 'A Room of One's Own', in M.H. Abrams & S. Greenblatt (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Seventh Edition*, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2000, p.2211

¹⁹² Aliaga-Buchenau, A., *The Dangerous Potential of Reading*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 7

tell us how to read, what to read, what value to place upon what we read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of those sanctuaries.”¹⁹³ The idea of ‘reading for pleasure’, rather than reading to ‘critique or impart knowledge’ suggests that the ‘common reader’ is able to choose what he reads, ‘guided by an instinct and the freedom to create for himself’ a ‘whole’ out of the different parts that make up a text. The ‘common reader’ is not excluded from his or her ability to read and read widely based on class or gender. He or she has the freedom to participate equally in a ‘reading community’ outside of economic, social and political constraints.

The reader’s ability to draw on ‘instinct’ to creatively interpret a text is foregrounded by the reader’s ability to read, understand and interpret language. Jacques Rancière writes that “reading is not only an activity bringing about knowledge or pleasure. It is the achievement of a redistribution of the sensible that is involved in writing.”¹⁹⁴ The redistribution of the sensible “establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.”¹⁹⁵ In writing, the ‘common and shared’ is a community of readers who are able to read, understand and receive language. In this sense, possessing language means fully sharing in its reason. The ‘exclusive parts’ in writing are the myriad interpretations of language that can arise from the reader’s engagement with writing. Writing destroys inequality because it posits that the common is both the ability to receive language and to use it at the same time: “writing is not merely a means of transcribing the signs of language. It is also a status of language that defines an excess, an imbalance in the relationship between signs, things, and bodies.”¹⁹⁶ The ‘excess’ defined by writing is the liberation of the word from the body that wrote it and the meaning

¹⁹³ Woolf, V., ‘How to Read a Book’, *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 197

¹⁹⁴ Rancière, J., ‘The Method of Inequality: An Answer to Some Questions’, G. Rockhill & P. Watts (eds.), *History, Politics, Aesthetics, Jacques Rancière*, London, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 278

¹⁹⁵ Rancière, J., *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. G. Rockhill, London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004, p. 12

¹⁹⁶ Rancière, J., ‘The Method of Inequality: An Answer to Some Questions’, G. Rockhill & P. Watts (eds.), *History, Politics, Aesthetics, Jacques Rancière*, London, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 278

originally ascribed to it. Here Rancière interprets Plato's idea that writing is "the wrong circuit on which words are launched as orphans, available to anybody, without being guided by the voice of the master who knows how they have to be related to things and also who is entitled or not entitled to make an appropriate use of them."¹⁹⁷ Drawing on Plato, Rancière posits a distinction between speech and writing. Writing is the 'wrong circuit', not in the sense that a 'wrong speaker' is addressing a 'wrong audience', but rather that the written word has the potential to be interpreted in a different way to that which the speaker (author) intended. Whereas speech is performative through inflection, tone and intent by the speaker, writing redistributes and therefore frees language from concrete bodies and signs. In this way 'words are launched as orphans' freed from the origin and intent of their creation. The written word can be accessed by anybody and written by anybody and can also therefore be interpreted by anybody according to his or her subjective engagement with a given text. In this way writing negates the speaker-master (and the master narrative).

Woolf sets up a similar distinction in Bernard's final speech. By assuming the role of a primary speaker, a rhapsode, who addresses the reader directly, Bernard claims the master narrative of 'his life and the lives of his friends' as his own and imparts his interpretation to a silent audience. By drawing the reader into the text as a 'character' who sits across a table from Bernard and hears the story of his life, Woolf sets up hierarchies between speaker and listener. In Rancièrian terms, Bernard performs the role of the master who controls and imparts 'knowledge' and the reader becomes the 'ignorant' voiceless listener who receives it. Woolf then complicates this exchange by making constant self-reflexive references to the materiality of the text. Indeed, as Bernard's final narrative nears its end, his allusions to the materiality of the text (and indeed the very fiction of his existence) become more frequent. In this way, Woolf

¹⁹⁷ Rancière, J., 'The Method of Inequality: An Answer to Some Questions', G. Rockhill & P. Watts (eds.), *History, Politics, Aesthetics, Jacques Rancière*, London, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 278

slowly dissolves Bernard's authority as speaker when he begins to "doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now", thereby alluding to the fictional nature of the narrative. He remarks, "I have seen so many different things, have made so many different sentences," which not only further aligns him with the author, but also with the reader, who through the creative act of reading, has 'made sentences' and 'seen things', by "rubbing [his or her] eyes along surfaces", or rather the pages of the text. Finally Bernard asks,

"Who am I?" I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt "I am you." This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome.¹⁹⁸

Not only does Bernard consolidate the multiplicity of his subjectivity as a composite of seven characters, but more importantly he posits his subjectivity as inseparable from the reader by stating, in quotation marks, 'I am you'. By stating 'I am you', Bernard dissolves his role as speaker when his singular identity is 'overcome' and becomes the voice of himself, the reader, and others, a subjectless speech act. By asserting sameness between himself and the reader, he acknowledges the reader's participation in the construction of 'Bernard' as a character in a fictional text. Bernard confirms change from speaker to fictional character when he states, "now no one sees me and I change no more. Heaven be praised for solitude that has removed the pressure of the eye, the solicitation of the body, and all need of lies and phrases."¹⁹⁹ Bernard 'change[s] no more' in that he has completed his 'emergence'. By removing himself as an active participant in the telling of 'his story', the only remaining agent in the ordering and organising of the text is the reader. Moreover, Bernard is freed from the 'pressure of the eye, the solicitation of the body' in that he no longer occupies a space outside of his constitution

¹⁹⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, pp.221-222

¹⁹⁹ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin Books, 1931, p.226

through written language. The reader thus ‘emerges’ from *The Waves* as a fully formed and constituted ‘reader’, who is alerted to his or her ability to creatively organise the written language and events of the novel into a coherent ‘whole.’

Conclusion: The Common Reader

In *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf answers the question “how in your opinion are we to prevent war?”²⁰⁰ She ends her ‘letter’ by stating:

We can best help you to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in co-operation with its aim. That aim is the same for us both. It is to assert the rights of all— all men and women—to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty.²⁰¹

In this extract Woolf implies that English society is divided into two parts. The collective ‘we’ and the society to whom this statement is addressed. The collective ‘we’ are those who for various reasons – gender and class among them – are barred from a formal tertiary education but are nevertheless self-educated. The second society (‘your society’) is comprised of the male, upper class and formally educated British citizen then at the centre of power and politics in twentieth-century Britain. By positing a divide between these two parts of society, Woolf challenges the definitions of ‘Justice, Equality and Liberty’, highlighting the inequalities in British society between men and women, between rich and poor – and overarching all of this – between the educated and the uneducated.

The inequality of education between rich and poor and men and women was a central concern for Woolf throughout her career as a novelist and essayist. She marks the difference in the education of women compared with the education of men in *A Room of One’s Own*, provides a model for self-education in ‘The Common Reader’ and ‘How to Read a Book’ and as noted above, marks a divide in society between the formally educated and informally educated in *Three Guineas*. Key to Woolf’s preoccupation with education was the role that education played in subject-making practices. Access to higher education worked as a marker

²⁰⁰ Woolf, V., *Three Guineas*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1938, p. 3

²⁰¹ Woolf, V., *Three Guineas*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1938, p. 131

of difference and could limit or advance the individual economically and socially. Furthermore, Woolf identified formal tertiary education as tied to the development of political subjects through the emphasis that it placed on patriotism and British national ideology. Woolf quotes the Lord Chief Justice of England who confirms this by stating,

Englishmen are proud of England. For those who have been trained in English schools and universities, and who have done the work of their lives in England, there are few loves stronger than the love we have for our country. [...] England is the home of democratic institutions [...] The home of Liberty is in England.²⁰²

According to Woolf the inequality of access to education alongside the social and political inequality of women contradicts the idea that ‘England is the home of democratic institutions’ and ‘Liberty.’ As such, throughout her career, Woolf sought other means of subject-making in twentieth-century English society by advocating an alternative to politics and patriotism in the form of a community of self-educated readers. My revisionist reading of *The Waves* as a *Bildungsroman* – a novel genre traditionally associated with subject formation and self-education – reveals that *The Waves* is not only an experimentation in form and language but that it also facilitates the formation of a ‘common reader’ or ‘reading subject’, who participates in a loosely-affiliated community of readers.

If *The Waves* is a *Bildungsroman* that facilitates the formation of a ‘common reading subject’ different to the ‘patriotic subject’, can we then assume that that the novel also advances a politics different to the formal politics of English society and state? *The Waves* is a political novel, but not because it points to a relation between Woolf and her representation of political movements, social structures or different types of identities, the exercise of or a struggle for power. The novel is also not concerned with administering the mechanisms of formal governance or the ideological interplay between society and state, which in mid-twentieth-century England converged on the idea of empire as the foundation of a unifying and totalising

²⁰² Woolf, V., *Three Guineas*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1938, p. 8

national identity. *The Waves* is a political novel because it creates a ‘common reader’ or ‘reading subject’; in the process, Woolf dissolves the hierarchy of intelligence posited by the unequal class structures that distinguish between the highly educated ‘ones who know’ and the ‘uneducated’ and marginalised in British society. In doing so, she constructs and generates a community of readers premised on the idea that everyone is intellectually capable of understanding and critically engaging with and participating in the society and politics of a given time and place.

The *Bildungsroman* genre is the ideal literary form through which the individual’s engagement with the modalities of language, thought and the world can be developed because of the relation that it posits between aesthetics and the education of the reader. The very nature of the genre as malleable to the socio-political climate that it captures in content and form and the genre as one of fictional story-telling does not overtly instruct the reader in the correct ways to develop a subjectivity. In essays such as ‘How to Read a Book’, Woolf instructs the reader in the art of reading by explicating the skills she saw as necessary to read and interpret. Conversely, *The Waves* is a thoroughly modernist experimentation with aesthetics, language, form and characterisation that attempts to capture the flux and chaos of the ‘modern’ experience. In *The Waves*, Woolf generates an interactive narrative and aesthetic novel-scape through which the reader progresses alongside the primary protagonist.

Thus the key difference between the instructive text and the modernist *Bildungsroman* is the agency that the latter accords the reader. The instructive text imparts knowledge to a presumably unknowledgeable reader, while the *Bildungsroman* actively invites the participation and self-education of the reader. In *The Waves*, the reader progresses alongside Bernard, performing the same tasks and developing his or her equal and already-present ability to receive and understand language in acts of creative organising and ordering of the novel’s content. By performing these tasks, the reader develops and emerges from his or her

engagement with the novel as a sensitive critical reader able to apply these skills not only to the reading of literature, but also to critically, and thus politically, engaging with the raw material and lived experience of the everyday.

Readings of *The Waves* that have characterised the novel as inaccessible and abstractly experimental in content and form have often failed to note the subtle but effective thread of social, political and historical engagement underlying the poetic prose and stream-of-consciousness narration. By reading *The Waves* as a *Bildungsroman*, I have uncovered its place within a larger conversation – about the development of a self and a political process of subjectification– that also appears, albeit in different forms, in all of Woolf’s novels and other critical correspondence with the politically charged landscape of England in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The ‘common reader’ is central to this conversation because Woolf, who lacked a formal education, was herself a common reader and her interaction with society was largely influenced by her self-taught ability to read astutely as well as widely. In this sense, *The Waves*, as the novel that Woolf cited as “a brave attempt [that] marks something struggled for”, alerts us to the equality of men and women in their capacity to form a singular and self-developed subjectivity amidst the flux and chaos of the everyday by drawing on the infinite interpretive and creative powers of the imagination.²⁰³ Woolf intervenes in subjection and disrupts the process of interpellation through the genre of *Bildungsroman*, carving out space for the common reader to seize control of his or her psychic and emotional interior and creating a stage for a different political self to emerge, one that is marked as provisional. Woolf, in other words, does not prescribe a ‘right form’ of subjectification. Rather she recognises that subjectivity is as diverse and nuanced as the society in which it is formed and negotiated – a

²⁰³ Woolf, V., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Anne Olivier Bell (ed.) 5 vols, vol. 4, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1983, p. 8

politically powerful idea that disrupts the fiction of national unity and replaces it with a unity of disunity, a common reading public.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Rogelio de Egusquiza y Barrena, *Parsifal*, Oil on canvas, 1910²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Joanbanjo, Parsifal, Rogelio de Egusquiza y Barrena, oli sobre tela, museu del Prado, 28 April 2015[online photograph], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Rogelio_de_Egusquiza#/media/File:Parsifal,_Rogelio_de_Egusquiza_y_Barrena,_museu_del_Prado.JPG, (accessed 06/11/2015)

Appendix 2

Beethoven String Quartet No. 13 in Bb major (*Opus 130*)

And Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (p.3).

Dem Fürsten Nicolaus von Galitzin gewidmet.

Op.130.

Quartett N^o 13.

Adagio ma non troppo.

The image shows the first few measures of the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 13. The score is for Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked 'Adagio ma non troppo'. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes dynamics markings such as *p* (piano) and *cresc.* (crescendo). Two boxes labeled '1' and '2' are placed below the score, with arrows pointing to specific measures in the Violoncello part.

[Musical terms have been italicised and are my own addition to the text]

- 1) [*neutral*] “The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky...”
- 2) “...except that the sea was slightly [*piano*] creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, [*crescendo*] one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually. As they reached the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand [*piano, luftpause*]”²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁵ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin, 1931, p.3

2 3

3 4

- 3) [*luftpause*] “The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, [*crescendo*] the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman crouched 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”²⁰⁶.

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²⁰⁶ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin, 1931, p. 3

2 (80) Tempo I.

The musical score consists of four staves. The first two staves are for the vocal parts, and the last two are for the piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allegro.' and the dynamics range from piano (p) to fortissimo (f). The texture is marked 'non legato'. The score shows a gradual increase in volume and intensity from measure 4 to measure 5. Two boxes labeled '4' and '5' are placed below the first and second measures of the piano part, respectively.

- 4) [*Allegro*] “Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous [*non legato*] 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. Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence, which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue”²⁰⁷.
- 5) “The surface of the sea [*pianissimo*] slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out. Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible; an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all around it the sea blazed gold”²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁷ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin, 1931, p. 3

²⁰⁸ Woolf, V., *The Waves*, London, Penguin, 1931, p. 3