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A Silent Character in *The Waves*

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Introduction

Bernard is the only speaker in the final section of *The Waves*. Most studies on the section, including Makiko Minow-Pinkney's influential essay "*The Waves*", have concerned Bernard and the meaning of his speech. In this section, however, there is another character who has been less noted but should not be entirely dismissed: the person who is listening to Bernard, the person whom Bernard calls "you".

The character is a kind of enigma in one respect. He is similar to Percival in that the voice is absent in the text. The silence of Percival has been widely discussed, regarded as an absent centre of the novel. Sara Ruddick describes Percival as a "silent presence and vacuum-like absence which draws to itself the other characters' fantasies of their brother/leader/opposite" (203). From Virginia Woolf's point of view, it follows that his silence is a device to give unity to the text. Unlike the case of Percival, however, the silence of "you" never affects the content of the book, so that it has seldom drawn critics' attention. In fact, not reacting to the speech of Bernard, this character is a completely passive listener and seems to be meaningless. Strange to

say, however, Woolf takes the trouble to outline this seemingly insignificant character in the book. She, for instance, makes Bernard say, "I met you once, I think, on board a ship going to Africa" (168). It is therefore likely that the "you" as a silent character somehow functions in the final section in a different way from Percival. In this essay, we will analyse the meaning of the silent character, "you", by comparing the final section of *The Waves* with that of *To the Lighthouse*, which has a similar characteristic.¹⁾

I

In each final section, Woolf tries to give a synthesis to her work. In *To the Lighthouse*, the subject of its final section is the reunion of the Ramsays and their friends, who are introduced in the first section but seldom appear in the following section. As to *The Waves*, the aim of the last section is to "absorb all those scenes" (*Diary* 3 : 339) that appear in all the previous sections. Woolf carries out each attempt through the artistic attempt of one of her characters in each novel: Lily and Bernard. These characters, indeed, play the role of a surrogate author, for their artistic attempts are similar to the author's. In *To the Lighthouse*, the painter Lily Briscoe aims to realize unity in the structure of her painting. In *The Waves*, the potential novelist Bernard attempts to express his whole life, which is visualized by him as a "globe" (169), something unified.²⁾

These artists also have the same aesthetic ideal as Woolf. Her aspiration is to write a kind of work which can "stand further back from life" (*Essays* 4 : 435), to convey "a silence in life, a perpetual deposit of experience for which action provides no proper outlet and

our own words no fit expression" (*Essays* 3 : 497). In other words, she desires to solve the paradoxical problem of art, that is, to express what has been impossible to express in order to describe mental experience at a pre-rational level.⁹⁾ Lily, similarly, wishes to catch in painting "that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything" (*TL* 297). Bernard, also, longs for "broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement" rather than "beautiful phrases" which have already been established and admitted (*W* 169). As for how the aesthetic ideal should be realized in a work, Lily says: "Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent [...] but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron" (*TL* 264). The structure of the picture which Lily aims for is, therefore, shown as a combination of two things of opposite nature, the elusive and the solid. As Pinkney points out, this statement of Lily's functions as "a self-reflexive statement of the novel's own aspiration" (114), for Woolf herself aims at a structure with two contradictory features in her literary text: in her diary entry for 21 February 1927, she writes that she is striving for something "Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play" (*Diary* 3 : 128).

It is clear from the above that the final sections of *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* each present a double aesthetic attempt for unity: the attempt of one of the characters as an artist in his/her work and that of the author herself in her fiction. The point to be noted is how each surrogate author's attempt is connected with the author's attempt, which will be explored in the following pages.

II

Part III of *To the Lighthouse* presents two actions: one is Lily's painting of a picture; and the other is Mr. Ramsay's journey with two of his children, James and Cam, to the lighthouse. At the beginning of the part, Lily decides to solve a problem in the picture which she attempted yet left unfinished in Part I: the problem is "of some relation between those masses" (229), that is, how to give unity to the picture. Meanwhile, amid the sense of separation among the Ramsays after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Mr. Ramsay decides to make a journey to the lighthouse, a journey which he rejected in opposition to his wife and James in Part I. The journey can, therefore, represent Mr. Ramsay's (possibly unconscious) desire for reconciliation with his family. If Lily's aim is understood as cohesion in her painting, Woolf's aim is to unify all the characters in *To the Lighthouse* juxtaposed with the fulfilment of these two actions, namely, Lily's painting and Mr. Ramsay's journey.

The important thing is that Lily's attempt runs parallel to the author's attempt. What connects the two is Lily's consciousness, which covers most of Part III. That can be explained by the following two points.

The first point concerns the connection between Lily's attempt and Mr. Ramsay's journey. In Section 3, Lily faces the sea and the lighthouse, which are the main focus of her picture. She then recognizes that as an artist her self is divided between her location, with her picture, and the distance, with the Ramsays in the boat. Through her awareness of this, her picture and Mr. Ramsay's journey

are brought together throughout the following sections. In Section 3, on making the first stroke on her picture, Lily imagines the departure of the Ramsays. In Section 5, just when she imagines an air of isolation among the Ramsays on the boat, Lily is faced with a “formidable [...] space” (244) which it is difficult to treat in her painting. In Section 11, while supposing that the Ramsays are on the point of arriving at the lighthouse, she has almost finished her painting although she is still unsatisfied with some “disproportion” (296) in it. In Section 13, on imagining that “He [Mr. Ramsay] has landed” (319) and has been reconciled with his family, Lily completes her picture and achieves cohesion in it.

The second point relates to the connection between Lily’s attempt and the reintroduction of the characters who appeared in Part I. In Section 5, while struggling with the treatment of the “formidable [...] space” in her picture, she goes on “tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past” (267). Lily’s act of painting is, therefore, parallel with her remembering of the past, too. With “some trick of the painter’s eye” (279), that is, with the painter’s ability to visualize the characteristic of every person, Lily draws in her mind lively portraits of those whom she met in Part I. The important thing is that in her imagination Lily succeeds in being reconciled with each of them. Let us take the case of Charles Tansley. In Part I, Lily as a female artist feels a great antipathy to him, for he says, “Women can’t write, women can’t paint” (134). Towards the beginning of Part III, struggling with that “glaring, hideously difficult white space” (246–47) on her picture, Lily bitterly remembers Tansley’s words. One can easily imagine that the glaring space appears to Lily to be the glaring eye of Tansley, who used to criticize her. One may, on the other hand,

feel that the glaring space is the reflection of the mind of Lily herself, who is probably glaring at the space at this moment. It can be suggested from this that Lily's imagination of Tansley's glare is, in fact, the reflection of her own glaring at herself: she confuses her own struggle in painting with her enmity against Tansley. In other words, although Lily ascribes her difficulty with painting to Tansley's criticism of her, her problem is entirely her own. It is, then, not until she becomes aware of this mind trick that she can proceed to the completion of her painting. In Section 11, she finds that "Her own idea of him was grotesque. [. . .] He did for her instead of a whipping-boy. She found herself flagellating his lean flanks when she was out of temper" (303). So Lily admits that her unfavourable judgement of Tansley was unfair to him, for it stems only from her own need. Lily's attempt at unity in painting thus accords with her effort to recollect impressions of her acquaintances and to form peaceful relationships with them.

These two points suggest that Woolf aims at the unification of all the characters of the book through Lily's consciousness of the present actions—Mr. Ramsay's action and hers—and of the past. In this sense, Lily almost becomes in this part of the book a metafictional existence who takes the author's viewpoint, from which *To the Lighthouse* is written.

It is likely that the two attempts for unity—Lily's and Woolf's—are connected and realized in the end by Lily's thought, "I have had my vision" (320). There arise, however, two problems in the ending.

One problem relates to Lily's existence. Because of her metafictional position, Lily's viewpoint, from which she thinks, "I have had my vision", is also Woolf's own viewpoint, from which the

unification of all the characters in the book is admitted. It follows therefore that Lily's viewpoint is half inside and half outside the world of the fiction, which has just attained unity. With her viewpoint partly left outside the unity, the integration of her existence as a character into the unity of all the other characters is left unresolved.

The other is an aesthetic problem. It is probable that in the end Lily's aesthetic ideal is realized in her painting. We can surmise from the text that her picture is composed of a number of masses and a central line which is added at the end; and if those masses, which are diverse in colour and shape, are of a "feathery and evanescent" nature "on the surface", the central line can be something solid which collects and holds them together "beneath the fabric" (264). The text of the book, on the other hand, does not always attain such a structure. Since the assertive conclusion that "I have had my vision" evokes a clear sense of the beginning as well as the ending, the image of Part III as a whole becomes somewhat linear. It should be remembered that "linearity" is treated ironically in *To the Lighthouse*. In Part I, for instance, Mr. Ramsay's concept of intellectual achievement is figuratively described as alphabetical order, A to Z (56). This is a humorous expression of his linear way of thinking, jesting at his rigid nature. In addition, the strict juxtaposition of Lily's painting and Mr. Ramsay's journey throughout the part gives a highly methodical image to Part III. Indeed, in her diary entry for 5 September 1926, Woolf confesses her struggle to connect these two actions:

The problem is how to bring Lily & Mr. R [amsay] together & make a combination of interest at the end. [...] Could I do it in a

parenthesis? so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time? (*Diary* 3 : 106)

The linear or methodical image of Part III is rather inconsistent with Woolf's aesthetic ideal, which is realized in her surrogate Lily's picture as a combination of the evanescent and the solid. Such an image is not immune to the organized, something systematic, which, as we saw previously, the author tries to evade in this novel. It might be argued that multiple layers of thoughts and perceptions introduced in this part succeed in adding a fugitive characteristic to the part. Still, the most dominant of them is Lily's perception as an artist here on the lawn, painting, and it is its dominancy that reduces the supposed effect of transiency in the part. Strictly speaking, hence, whereas Lily's attempt for unity in her painting is accomplished at the end, Woolf's aspiration for it in her book is still unaccomplished.

III

Let us now turn to the final section of *The Waves*. This section has generally been considered to be the long soliloquy section of Bernard. To be exact, however, the section begins not with his soliloquy, but with his narration to an unknown person, "you", in some restaurant. "Now to explain to you the meaning of my life", says Bernard, and he tries to summarize his whole life (168). Since the listener "you" is silent throughout his story, only Bernard's narrative is the text of *The Waves*; and his listener "you" becomes the reader of *The Waves*. Identifying with "you", the reader gains the lively sense of listening to his story, facing him. This sense is further

heightened by Bernard's close delineation of his own appearance from the point of view of his listener, such as "you see me, sitting at a table opposite you, a rather heavy, elderly man, grey at the temples" (169).

In terms of Woolf's attempt to give unity to her work, it follows that she tries to do this through Bernard's narration to the reader. The question is why she creates such a double structure in the text, a story in her story; and how the reader's engaging in Bernard's story works in her attempt. To bring this out, we will analyse Bernard's narration in connection with Woolf's art of giving a synthesis to her work.

At first, Bernard's story of his own life apparently goes on methodically in chronological order, as a written autobiography. He begins: "In the beginning, there was the nursery" (169). Because of his "vague and cloudy nature" (194), however, his story proves to be discursive. It soon begins to include sudden interruptions, paradoxes, and digressions. Moreover, his frequent emphasis on his purpose in telling his life-story sounds repetitious and awkward. Let us examine these capricious or awkward elements one by one in terms of Woolf's attempt, that is, how they are presented in the text.

Sudden interruptions are sometimes caused by Bernard's reference to music or sounds. For example, while remembering the young hero Percival, Bernard stops to say, "But there should be music, some wild carol. Through the window should come a hunting-song from some rapid unapprehended life—a sound that shouts among the hills and dies away" (172). The rhythm pattern after the dash is: $\times \angle \times \angle \times \angle \times \angle \times \angle \times \angle$. This regular rhythm sounds like the rhythmic movement of the hooves of a hunter's horse and can convey the speaker's wild emotion, inspired by the young hero's existence.

Another example is found in his talking about his first love. This time he says: "Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting-song, Percival's music; but a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pearling song" (177). One must notice that this music is characterized as opposite in nature to the preceding one, Percival's music. This characteristic is also reflected in the rhythm. The noun phrase after the semicolon includes a series of six adjectives with the flowing consonants /l/ or /r/. The latter three also contain long vowels. With the combination of the flowing consonants and long vowels, the phrase takes on a streaming sound, contrary to the vigorous sound of the phrase on Percival. It sounds like the imploring of those who love, and can convey the speaker's lingering attachment to his lover.

As to paradoxes, we can find one in his talking about love. There are two memories, both of which are explained by him as "first love." One can be found in his recollection of his childhood: he was "in love for the first time" (171). The other can be found in his talking about his schooldays: he experienced "the flying moment of first love" (177). This paradox suggests that one experience had almost as great an influence on the speaker's life as the other, so that both seem to him to be the "first" in importance. Thus, paradoxes faithfully reflect some hidden feelings of the speaker, suggesting the truth of his inner experience behind the fact which is actually reported in the text. Since interruptions and paradoxes thus map the delicate tone of the speaker's sensation onto his rough review of each experience, they consequently make the text rich in tone and nuance.

As regards digressions, the most prominent of them is the story of the lives of the other six people in the book. While looking back on

his own life, Bernard notices that his life is closely related to the others'. Narrating every stage of his life, then, he also mentions their lives, until at last he says, "it is not one life that I look upon ; I am not one person ; I am many people" (196). His story of his own life, after all, turns out to be the story of all the characters' lives in *The Waves*. Since the main course of Bernard's story is his own life, the others' lives are told fairly unmethodically. Let us take one of them, Rhoda's life, and put all the descriptions concerning it as they occur in Bernard's narration :

Rhoda was wild—Rhoda one never could catch. She was both frightened and clumsy. (175)

Rhoda came wandering vaguely. She would take advantage of any scholar in a blowing gown, or donkey rolling the turf with slippers to hide behind. (178)

Rhoda, the nymph of the fountain always wet [...]. (183)

She gazed over the slate roofs—the nymph of the fountain always wet, obsessed with visions, dreaming. (195)

[...] I [...] evoke [...] the figure of Rhoda, always so furtive, always with fear in her eyes, always seeking some pillar in the desert [...]; she had killed herself. (199)

The important thing is that the original image of Rhoda—"frightened and clumsy" (175)—is transformed and repeated throughout Bernard's story. The second passage above gives a humorous version of such an image of Rhoda. The third and fourth passages compare Rhoda to "the nymph of the fountain", which is, as Kate Flint points out, Arethusa in Greek mythology.⁴⁾ Arethusa, who is originally a woodland nymph, is transformed into a fountain in order to escape

Alpheus, who loves and chases her. Found out by him even in this form, she escapes further through the bowels of the earth. Arethusa is therefore a mythological version of Rhoda's frightened and elusive character. With her transformed appearance, Arethusa also represents Rhoda's way of life: for Rhoda, who has difficulty living as she is because of the unstable state of her mind—for example, she has an instinctive dread of life itself—to live is almost equivalent to disguise herself. The last passage then gives the most serious expression of her character: her suicide. Such transformations of one image can also be found in the depictions of the other characters' lives. Unmethodical as the six lives are, they are each vividly characterized with variations and repetitions of the same image of themselves. In terms of the author's attempt, those digressions are not digressions, but an artful way of unifying all the characters' lives in a seemingly inartificial way as opposed to a methodical way.⁵⁾

These elements—interruptions, paradoxes, and digressions—on one hand make Bernard's life-story lively, but on the other hand tend to make it indistinguishable from the soliloquies in the other sections. Another element to be noted regarding his story here is his frequent reference to the purpose of his story, such as "But to return. Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe which we turn about in our fingers" (178). This often draws the reader's attention to what end the present story is making for, thus serving to give a certain consistency to the text, which would otherwise become too desultory.

Let us review Bernard's story as a whole. Seen in terms of structure, the text of Bernard's narration is capricious and evanescent on the surface, with interruptions, paradoxes and digressions, but at

bottom coherent, with his restless search to grasp some form that might shape life meaningfully. This structure is the very structure that Lily Briscoe aims for and achieves in her painting in *To the Lighthouse*: “Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, [...] but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron” (TL 264). It can therefore be said that the text of the final section of *The Waves* fulfils the aesthetic ideal which Lily realizes on her canvas but which the text of *To the Lighthouse* misses. It should, moreover, be noted that the reader as a listener is so engaged in the speaker’s narration that such a judgement on the structure of the text is scarcely formed while the narration is proceeding.

Seen in terms of content, the form of one of the characters’ casual narration to the reader—a form of contingent nature—enables the author to carry out her scheme of summarizing the whole book, under the disguise of the speaker’s unwittingness: Bernard’s story of his own life is, unexpectedly to the reader, formed into a review of all the characters’ lives in *The Waves*.

Thus we see that the form of Bernard’s narration to the reader of *The Waves*, the form which is afforded by the silent listener “you”, enables the author to realize her purpose of giving a synthesis to the book according to her aesthetic ideal, without any sign of artifice in the text. In other words, the form serves to screen the author’s scheme from the reader’s eyes so as not to give him the impression that the summing-up section is systematic. That can explain why “you” as a silent character is added to the final section, causing a dual structure in the text.

However, if that had been all that the author intended in the final

section, the unidentified “you” would not have needed to be specified by Bernard’s words, such as “I met you in the place where one goes to hang up one’s coat” (204). Another question is why “you”, who is almost identified with the reader during Bernard’s story, is marked as a character who can still be distinguished from the reader.

Towards the end of the book, when Bernard finishes his life-story, the listener “you” departs, leaving Bernard alone. If, at this time, the listener “you” had not been characterized in any way, “you” would be entirely identified with the reader; and the exit of “you” from *The Waves* would be the exit of the reader, that is, the end of the book. In that case the surrogate author Bernard would be left outside the synthesis of *The Waves*, just as in the case of Lily in *To the Lighthouse*.

We can explain from this fact what the author tries to do here, at the end of Bernard’s story. The author, on one hand, completes the unification of all the characters’ lives from Episode 1 to 8 and makes it independent of her fiction by treating it as Bernard’s story. She, on the other hand, displaces Bernard from the role of her surrogate and returns him to his original role, a soliloquist. Through this method, the dual structure of the text returns to a single structure, that is, the original one. The author then begins to reach for the further synthesis of *The Waves*, the synthesis which includes Episode 9, Bernard and his story. The thing to be noted, moreover, is that while the content of the book shifts from Bernard’s life-story to his soliloquy, the shift does not affect the style of the text. That is because Bernard’s story apparently takes on the manner of a soliloquy even before the transition, with his companion “you” silent during the story. It may therefore be said that the silence of “you” also functions

as a device to prevent any stylistic change in the text.

We will see, next, how the final synthesis of the book is presented. Left alone, Bernard notices that it is in solitude that he can be himself. In other words, he finds that the utmost peacefulness of his being lies only in silence. That revelation means that Bernard is tired of being “I”, the premise of one’s existence whenever one is conscious of others. His feelings can be generalized as follows. While conscious of the I or describing oneself as “I”, one cannot help but find the gap between “I” as the expression of oneself and oneself. This sense of the gap is a kind of misfortune for one’s being, for it indicates that one’s sense of oneself is decisively elusive, doomed to fall into the realm of the inexplicable. Moreover, it causes the depressing incongruity of one’s sense of oneself with one’s depiction of oneself, the depiction by which others perceive one’s being ; and consequently, one’s words concerning one’s being turn out to be nothing but “lies” (209) to others, a fact which might be offensive to one, especially to the writer Bernard, who has been pursuing a “true” story of himself.

Bernard’s sense of the peacefulness of his being, however, does not last long. Urged by the waiter of the restaurant to leave, Bernard has to regain consciousness of the I. He thinks, “Curse you then. [...] I, I, I, tired as I am, spent as I am, [...] I, an elderly man who is getting rather heavy and dislikes exertion, must take myself off and catch some last train” (210). The repetition of “I” reflects Bernard’s irritation with being forced to be conscious of “I”. It also sounds like his whipping himself on. His irritation may also be seen in the syntax of the sentence. While the subject “I” is repeated many times, the predicate “must take myself off [...] ” does not follow soon. That can suggest the reluctance of “myself” to follow “I”.

What saves Bernard then is “a sense of the break of day” (210), that is, a sense of the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is, as Woolf calls it, an “eyeless” world (*Diary* 3 : 76), which leads to an “I”-less world. Bernard finds that his mind begins to accord with the “eternal” movement of the waves, which suggests the approach of his eternal possession of the sense of being “I”-less (211). That means the arrival of eternal peace, which is nothing but his death. For this reason, even in his awareness of his death at the end of the book, his voice assumes a tone of rapture rather than of despair :

Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man’s, like Percival’s, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death! (211)

Although Bernard describes death as his enemy, his feelings about death are far from enmity. Rather, identifying with the young hero Percival, who was destined to die, Bernard is intoxicated with the prospect that he will certainly be beaten by death. The passage, thus, presents his yearning for death rather than his opposition to death. After the passage, finally, come Bernard’s silence and a scene of the phenomenal world at the same time : “*The waves broke on the shore*” (211). That suggests the dissipation of Bernard’s “I”, that is, his death. In terms of the unity of *The Waves*, the dissipation of the I of Bernard and a glimpse of the phenomenal world mean that Bernard’s existence is assimilated into the phenomenal world, which is the common background of all the characters’ lives in the book. Thus the last soliloquist is added to the union of all the other characters. In terms

of the author's viewpoint, the dissipation of the I of Bernard means that Bernard's eye—i.e. his viewpoint—is internalised in the text. Thus the author dislodges the lingering viewpoint of the last character in order to complete her project of giving a real synthesis to her work from her own point of view.

One must notice, on the other hand, that the last sentence "*The waves broke on the shore*" can also suggest the disintegration of the book itself, for the phrase "*The waves*" in this sentence is also the title of the book. *The Waves*, consequently, attains a conclusion vacillating between integration and disintegration. The cause of the adoption of vacillation here can be explained from the author's aesthetic ideal, which was mentioned earlier: to express what is impossible to express. What is indescribable is, once expressed, transformed into something different; however, it can never be presented unless it is described. One of the possible solutions to the paradoxical problem is to express it in such a way as to deny itself on asserting itself. So we see in the last sentence, as Pinkney puts it, "an impossible dialectic which aims to be 'integrated' at the moment of maximum dispersal" (159). Bernard's words at the end of his story take on the same function: he says, "[...] whether there is substance or truth in it I do not know" (204). By these words, he questions the worth of his story so as not to destroy its worth by asserting it.⁶⁾ It is by such a deconstructive nature of the last sentence that *The Waves* accomplishes unity according to the author's aesthetic ideal.

Let us summarize the functions of "you" as a silent character. In the first place, "you" is, as Bernard's silent listener, identified with the reader, which brings the form of Bernard's narration to the reader. The form serves Woolf's aim of giving a synthesis to her work

without making the reader aware of her intention. Secondly, when Bernard finishes his story, that is, when Woolf achieves the summarization of the preceding sections, the listener “you” differentiates himself from the reader to leave the book. The text, then, presents Bernard’s soliloquy, which means the shift of his position from a surrogate author to the author’s object of description. The author, finally, accomplishes the integration of all the lives in *The Waves*, including the last soliloquist Bernard.

Conclusion

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf carries out her attempt to synthesize her novel, giving Lily a metafictional role in the final section. This makes Woolf’s attempt unsuccessful in both stylistic and aesthetic senses. For one thing, Lily remains the author’s alter ego to the very end, excluded from the supposed union of the characters in the book. For another, the reader cannot but be conscious of what the author is aiming at through Lily’s consciousness as an artist, which produces a certain amount of rigidity and awkwardness in the text. In *The Waves*, on the other hand, Woolf succeeds in attaining the same purpose more skilfully by adopting a silent character who can be either the reader or a specific character. This method enables her to create a parallel structure in the text: the surrogate author’s story in the author’s story. She then surreptitiously accomplishes two levels of unity in *The Waves*: firstly, the unification of all the characters except one, who works as a surrogate author; and secondly, that of all the characters. While doing these, she also presents the narrative at a seemingly pre-rational level to the end of the book through her

surrogate's unwitting narration, thereby suiting her text to her aesthetics. It can hence be said that although having never been noticed, the silent character "you" is, like another silent character, Percival, an example of a lacuna in the text, a lacuna which functions as a device for the author's art of unification.

Notes

- 1) My attempt to compare *The Waves* with *To the Lighthouse* is not casual. Several critics have already pointed out a thematic similarity between these two novels. Stella McNichol remarks that if *To the Lighthouse* is a work structured round some of "significant moments" in Virginia Woolf's childhood, *The Waves* can be considered as "a more analytic and theoretic novel" which "attempts to convey more of the meaning behind the experience of transcendence in those 'moments'" (117). Thus McNichol regards the two as a kind of successive experiments in the author's pursuit of the same theme.
- 2) This image of life as a "globe" probably stems from Woolf's widely quoted idea that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (*Essays* 4 : 160). So it can be safely stated that Bernard's attempt to depict the whole life is allied to Woolf's.
- 3) For a further discussion of Woolf's complex relationship with language, see Nora Eisenberg, "Virginia Woolf's Last Words on Words: *Between the Acts* and 'Anon'". Although the medium of words was a source of delight for the born writer Woolf, she also had "the recurring sense that language was an artificial convention—'inadequate to its [the mind's] experience', 'an impure medium', 'slow and deluding'. For language was rigid, Woolf often feared, dividing a world that was, or should be, unified." With such ambivalent feelings towards words, Woolf thought that we need "another language—'the little language'", which is composed of "small or broken words, brief or unfinished sentences, cries, calls, songs, silences, and even sights and gestures" in order to mark and foster "our common life, not the single life, the single self that wars with others" (253 – 54).
- 4) Kate Flint, notes, *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf (London : Penguin, 1992) 283.
- 5) This free form of reviewing the six people's lives may reflect Woolf's idea of how biography should be written. In her essay "The New Biography",

Woolf favourably writes that with the coming of the twentieth century, “a change came over biography”: it became more like fiction than chronicles, so that it can “transmit personality” more effectively than ever (*Essays* 4 : 475–77).

- 6) Mark Hussey regards this indecisive conclusion of Bernard’s as the awareness of his failure in storytelling, and observes that his awareness is, ultimately, that of Woolf’s in her own narration (94). However, that argument ignores Woolf’s intention to make her fiction something opposite to an assertive piece of writing. It might be more appropriate to think that it is, rather, with a positive intention that she makes Bernard doubtful about the value of his story.

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