THE WAVES

While revising *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf recorded in her Diary on 23rd November, 1926, her desire to write "some semi-mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; and time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident - say the fall of a flower - might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist - nor time either."¹ Leonard Woolf's footnote below this entry suggests that it refers to "perhaps *The Waves* or *Moths*."² The footnote also clarifies that the idea of *The Waves* first came to Virginia Woolf on September 30, 1926. Later on, in the beginning of the next year (February 21, 1927), she conjectured the possibility to "invent a new kind of play... Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play."³ The rudimentary sketch conceives of a woman and a man who think, do, play, write, say, sing, speak and miss something. She continued at her new book for about three years.

On March 28, 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote down that she was "not satisfied... with the frame."⁴ Two months later too, she was still searching for an angle for narration, but was confident of overcoming her dissatisfaction and difficulties:

How am I to begin it? And what is it to be ? ... I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might be done in that way. A mind thinking. They might be islands of light-islands in the stream that I am trying to convey; life itself going on.... A lamp and a flower pot in the centre.
The flower can always be changing. But there must be more unity between each scene than I can find at present.... One must get the sense that this is the beginning; this the middle; that the climax - when she opens the window and the moth comes in.... But who is she? I am very anxious that she should have no name.... Of course I can make her think backwards and forwards; I can tell stories. But that's not it.

She concentrated on her work, but some problems confronted her as yet. She had not been able to achieve impersonality so far: "Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker? One wants some device which is not a trick." The question of finding a vantage point from which to unfold the panorama of her book also persisted.

Dramatists, poets, and novelists have often likened the phases of human life to progression of a day from morning till evening. The theme of *The Waves*, therefore, is not new to us, nor is it to Virginia Woolf. But with each novel she wrote, she devised a different method to examine life through consciousness. The nine sections of *The Waves*, each preceded by an interlude in italics, comprise movements in the lifetime of man from childhood to full maturity. This is an ideal outline for the expression of the experience of life. The nine sections have been stitched into three groups of three each: childhood, youth, full maturity.

Ines Verga observes of the novels of Virginia Woolf:

*Sometimes she divides her novels into parts and hence a resemblance to music is easily grasped, but sometimes the whole book is uninterrupted as it were by the following movement and is like a symphonic poem. Her novels are full of music, at least they convey a musical impression. There is always a musical pattern, consciously or unconsciously accomplished. We can find in her novels examples of point counter point: two important scenes going on at the same time, variation: a theme and its development.*
The Waves is a sextet in sonata form which, as Calvin S. Brown explains, "is an expanded ABA pattern divided into an exposition, a development section, and a recapitulation." The adaptation to literature of this musical form, however, as Brown points out, is fraught with certain dangers. The first is how to handle the recapitulation in such a manner that it does not sound to be a wearisome repetition of the initial exposition, and the second is how to accomplish the instrumental effect of orchestration. Virginia Woolf steers clear of both these dangers in The Waves. Recapitulation without redundancy is provided through the variety of individual memories in section seven, memories of the group gathered at Hampton Court in section eight and Bernard's summing up in section nine. The six characters in the book are the six instruments in the orchestra.

Comparing literature, painting and music Brown says that there is in contemporary literature a tendency to move from the concrete to the abstract:

Recent literature has constantly sought to present that one abstraction which includes within itself all others—the human consciousness. Like Goethe, such writers as Proust, Joyce, and Aiken have used persons and events merely as a necessary scaffolding to present the abstraction of consciousness itself.

Thus we see that, in a very general way, literature has tended to abandon the representational element and to devote itself increasingly to the presentation of abstraction. Brown does not mention Virginia Woolf who, of course, concentrates on nothing except human consciousness. In a letter dated 28th August, 1930, to Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf wrote about The Waves:
I think... that my difficulty is that I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot. Does this convey anything? And thus though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader.10

The Waves which is written to a "rhythm" and not to a "plot" is elaborately designed to explore consciousness in all its depth and breadth from the vivid, sensual impressions of childhood to the nostalgic memories of old age. There is perhaps an inevitable development which we see in Virginia Woolf's use of structure in the novel as we move along from To the Lighthouse to The Waves. The extreme and pained sense of isolation and frustration which pervades the consciousness of virtually all of the characters in To the Lighthouse has in The Waves resulted in nine reveries or formal soliloquies which are, at one and the same time, highly subjective, even confessional. These are rather desperate attempts on the part of the speakers to render some sense of design, purpose, and meaning to the constantly dispersed flux of their existence and of the exterior world which they apprehend. In hypothetically spoken soliloquies, the sensations and reflections of six characters as they experience life, are presented. Since the soliloquies have no parallel with anything in real life, this technique is one element in Virginia Woolf's abandonment of "representation" in her fiction. The Waves, indeed, consists of the states of mind of six characters.

So the unusual feature of the The Waves is the lack of formal plot. In its place are the structural elements
already mentioned: sonata form and orchestration in six voices. The narrative element, reduced below what may have seemed minimal in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, is replaced by six people telling the reader how they feel and think in the various exigencies of life. Through these reports, Virginia Woolf offers her readers the psychological pleasure of comparing and contrasting the varied reactions of the six persons to the experiences of life. For example, it is delightful to reflect on the different reactions of Louis, Neville, and Bernard to the chapel service in section two. Then there is the effect of maturation on the individuals: the differences in their reactions and in the things they do and think as they progress through life.

There are nine reveries in the novel and accompanying the nine reveries are eight interludes during which the day which begins in the first prelude of *The Waves* evolves into midday and finally sunset. These interludes carry forward Virginia Woolf's concern with defining the relationship between man's aspirations and struggles and the constant of nature. There is a hint in the *Diary* as to what the author specifically intended in delineating the interludes:

The interludes are very difficult, yet I think essential; so as to bridge and also to give a background - the sea; insensitive nature - I don't know. But I think, when I feel this sudden directness, that it must be right: anyhow no other form of fiction suggests itself except as a repetition at the moment.

The interludes detail especially the breaking and falling of the waves on the shore, the movements of the wind and the journey of the sun in the course of a day.
towards its setting. In similar fashion the lives of Benard, Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny and Rhoda move from childhood to death. At every point, structure and theme have been perfectly fused. More particularly the breaking and crashing of the waves become metaphorical for not only the insensitive and indifferent aspects of nature, but, indeed, for the flux of life to which the highly formal monologues of the speakers are juxtaposed in such effective contrast. At the same time, as the soliloquies become, in most cases, more strained, fatigued, and tenuous, the very rise and fall of the waves, incessant as they are, become the constant which will, even in its fluidity, survive these six characters.

But Virginia Woolf's mind is in search of an order over the chaos of sensation and impression, and this is provided by the framework of the time scheme. The interludes in *The Waves* serve this purpose. They represent various attempts at order and also mark the different stages of progress made by the six characters to achieve order.

Sense impressions dominate in childhood. When the book opens, four of the six children begin by saying, "I see", and the other two, "I hear". All through their lives, physical sensations occur and recur with the addition of other concerns introduced by old age. Interest in interpersonal relations is evinced by them when they are at school. Bernard speaks for others also when he sums up at the end of section two: "Larpent, John, Archie, Percival, Baker and Smith - I have liked them enormously. I have known one mad boy only. I have hated one mean boy only."
I enjoy in retrospect my terribly awkward breakfasts at the Headmaster's table with toast and marmalade (50). Bernard introduces the third section (college). The questions of personal identity are now added to physical sensations and interpersonal relations.

A search for the identity of ideas from the world of literature also begins: Byron, Gray, Tolstoy, Meredith, Pluto, Virgil are mentioned. In section four, all the six friends gather in a restaurant to bid farewell to Percival who is leaving for India. This meeting provides an opportunity to review earlier experiences and becomes a repetition of curves, angles, and figures in various parts of the same painting or the repetition of earlier themes in music. Their experience, as Jinny says, has broadened. But new experiences are still awaited. So there is a note of expectancy. She says: "Emerged from the tentative ways, the obscurities and dazzle of youth, we look straight in front of us, ready for what may come... Days and days are to come; winter days, summer days." (121). In section five, Percival's accidental death in India is reported and all the six friends ponder over the problem of death which is so central that it is reported midway in the book. Section six shows people in full career: Louis at work in girdling enterprises; Susan busy on the farm, glutted with natural happiness; Jinny consummating a love affair; and Neville observing: "Time passes, yes. And we grow old." (152).

The recapitulation of the third movement begins with individual memories in part seven, and is continued as the
group looks back over life during their Hampton Court reunion. It is concluded in Bernard's summary of section nine which, J.W. Graham writes, is very much demanded by the "cyclical structure" of the novel:

She gave all the lives through one voice, Bernard's. There were very good practical reasons for this decision. The cyclical structure from which she never deviated, and which demanded the treatment of old age and death, meant that she could not end the book immediately after the reunion dinner, at which the speakers have reached middle age; and yet to deal with the old age and death of each speaker in turn, as she had so far done with the other stages of their lives, would have meant a much longer book and would still have left unsolved the problem of how to conclude.12

The three major parts of the novel show the six friends together. They spend their childhood at Elvedon, assemble in London to say farewell to Percival, and have a final reunion at Hampton Court where they find occasion to review life from a new perspective. Neville asks: "'What have you made of life, we ask, and I? You, Bernard; you, Susan; you, Jinny; and Rhoda and Louis? The lists have been posted on the doors.... I feel in my private pocket and find my credentials... I have passed. I have papers in my private pocket that prove it!'" (181). Bernard also gives a call to the group to review life: "'Marriage, death, travel, friendship... town and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out!'" (196). The final section gives a more general recapitulation. In it we receive a chance to see through Bernard's memory many of the events already
passed through in life. These reflections of maturity represent the residue of impressions after a lapse of thirty or forty years.

Virginia Woolf's handling of the whole movement of recapitulation is very skilful. Past memories are integrated with an account of the present and reflections thereon in a manner that they do not at all sound monotonous. They are titillating and alluring repetitions of what has gone before. There is a great variety in this repetition: individual memories in part seven, memories streaming out of the Hampton Court reunion and Bernard's random recital are really reiterations of great and lasting themes of life and death. Virginia Woolf finds repetition, rhythm and continuity not only as the principles of art but also of life. Louis says:

'The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greenes, of apricots and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. The average men, including her rhythm in their rhythm... take their greens, take their apricots and custard. Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again'

The last movement has been constructed strictly on the sonata principle - fast, slow, fast, or ABA. The reality of the exposition, development and recapitulation scheme in the sonata, Hugh Ottaway says:

depends entirely on a new kind of rhythmic and harmonic activity. Directed to the establishing of successive key-centres, in such a way that one key is not only succeeded but supplanted by another, this activity is founded on the special relationship of tonic and dominant: the dominant of the new key has the power to push the old key into the
background, almost as if the latter had never been established. This 'almost' is important, for the ultimate return to the main key of the movement should carry with it a true sense of homecoming, and so eliminate the claims of all possible rivals.13

Bernard's being the only speaker in the final section responds to this requirement and establishes the musical form of The Waves.

It has already been established that Virginia Woolf learnt from the Post-Impressionists, particularly Cezanne, the total way of organising a picture so that its various parts were balanced and so that everything in it had equal importance and contributed to a single, unbroken composition of the book. In thus insisting on the balance and continuity of the whole structure, she is following Cezanne. From him, she learnt much about the organisation of her work in rhythmic patterns through the repetition and variation of forms. But in The Waves the parallel to music is greater than to painting, for repetition in music and literature which are time arts, are experienced sequentially whereas in painting these are spread in space. The novel opens with: "'I see a ring', said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light'" (6). One of the most frequent repetitions calls attention to Louis's sense of historical continuity. He refers again and again to the Nile, and women with red pitchers going to it: "'Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river...'" (9). The last reference out of the total seven reads as: "'The whisper of leaves, water running down gutters, green
flecked with dahlias or zinnias; I, now a duke, now Plato, companion of Socrates; the tramp of dark men and yellow men migrating east, west, north and south; the eternal procession, women going with attache cases down the Strand as they went once with pitchers to the Nile." (142-143).

Another leitmotif, connected with Bernard, is his storytelling. It appears six times; for the first time: "'Where is Bernard?' said Neville. 'He has my knife.... He leaves me in the lurch; he follows Susan; and if Susan cries he will take my knife and tell her stories.'" (15), and for the last: "'But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story - and there are so many, and so many - stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like children we tell each other stories... What delights me... is the confusion, the height, the indifference and the fury. Great clouds always changing, and movement; something sulphurous and sinister, bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost, and I forgotten, minute, in a ditch. Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then'" (204-205).

Following the arguments of William Barrett in his book *Irrational Man*, Michael Payne finds a non-Aristotellean order in *The Waves*. He writes:

Of even greater significance... is the accuracy with which Professor Barrett's general discussion of the non-Aristotellean order of modern art accounts for both the artistic order of *The Waves* as a novel and the artistic order which Neville and Bernard advocate. Barrett lists three characteristics... of modern art: 'the flattening out of all planes', 'the flattening out of climaxes', and 'the flattening out of values'. 'The flattening out of all
planes' results, he tells us, in the telescoping of time, which we have observed in the interludes; 'the flattening out of climaxes' results in the reduction of the importance of any individual detail, which accounts for the absence of any obvious climax in the plot; and 'the flattening out of values' - which in painting 'means merely that large and small objects are treated as of equal value' - results in the absence of an obviously central character in the novel. 14

We have already realised the results of the "flattening out of all planes" and "flattening out of climaxes" in The Waves, while the "flattening out of values" may be seen in the disappearance of 'character'. Even Bernard who sums up and delivers the longest speech does so not because he is the most important character in the novel but because he has the gift of speech. Others have other gifts. With the aid of modulation, repetition, withdrawal and emergence of voices, Virginia Woolf was able to link the five characters in the background with Bernard in the foreground, giving a sense of simultaneous nearness and distance of all the six, and greatly diminishing and enhancing the importance of one.

What Bernard says is significant:

'And now I ask, "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' (248).

The import of this passage is that these are not so much six characters as they are aspects of a full rich human personality and that one is not more important than the other. Virginia Woolf's basic idea is that human beings are fundamentally alike, but that there are distinctively male and female qualities, each with its peculiar advantages.
A well-developed person, however, includes all the human qualities. In the characterisation in *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf was moved not by human oddities, but by human universalities.

We have commented at length on Virginia Woolf's idea of human personality, yet the six characters in *The Waves* are quite distinguishable from each other since each one of them possesses, as Mitchell A. Leaska points out, "singular powers of perception":

The rigorous formality of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*... offers no special difficulty in so far as identifying the speaking voice is concerned....(Although) the personae characteristically speak with the impeccable vocabulary and in the fastidious style of their author there is no ambiguity about who is speaking, because Mrs. Woolf throughout identifies each persona with 'said Bernard', 'said Rhoda', et cetera. Moreover, even if the 'he said' device had not been employed, the reader might still easily identify the character by sensing the singular powers of perception with which each is peculiarly endowed.15

One important aspect of *The Waves* is that in it the emphasis is not on personality but impersonality or the immersion of personality. It may, therefore, perhaps be appropriate to call the novel a glorification of impersonality. It gives a depth of its own which is achieved by combining the views of several observers, each with a different perspective. The six figures provide various perspectives on what they perceive and experience. This allows five outside views of each speaker augmented by his own introspection. The technique enables the reader to see a variety of human reactions to the various areas of life. It may also be noticed that a reciprocal effect is obtained from the reactions to 'reality' recorded by the six speakers.
Not only does each speaker give the reader insight into what he observes and reacts to all that is exterior to him, but his observations and reactions also constitute a commentary on himself.

The first section of *The Waves*, devoted to childhood, gives out an especially acute sensation of wind and water, sun and sand, birds and beasts, flowers and fish. Reference has already been made to the opening sentences in which each child reports seeing or hearing something. But illustrations of the children reporting their sensations are numerous:

'The grey-shelled snail draws across the path and flattens the blades behind him', said Rhoda.

'And burning lights from the window-panes flash in and out on the grasses', said Louis.

'Stones are cold to my feet', said Neville. 'I feel each one, round or pointed, separately.'

'The back of my hand burns', said Jinny, 'but the palm is clammy and damp with dew.'

'Now the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide', said Bernard.

'Birds are singing up and down and in and out all round us', said Susan.

'The beast stamps; the elephant with its foot chained; the great brute on the beach stamps', said Louis (7).

The appreciation of nature by Neville, the future poet, involves not only his observations of that which is around him, but also the sensations produced by these observations. The reflection that accompanies the observations is also noteworthy:
'In a world which contains the present moment', said Neville, 'why discriminate? Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure. The sun is hot. I see the river. I see trees specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past, through the red, through the green. Far away a bell tolls, but not for death. There are bells that ring for life. A leaf falls, from joy. Oh! I am in love with life!' (69).

Social reality too is conveyed through sensations. When the people in this novel reach college age, their view of life begins to broaden considerably, and their experiences become more varied. Bernard and Neville alone go to a University. Louis enters business in London, and the three girls embark on different patterns of living: Susan in the country, Jinny in London, and Rhoda, a drifter. This (third) section opens with Bernard's interior monologue, who asks: "'What am I?'" (64). Then a similar meditation of Neville, the one already quoted, follows, and towards the end of this, Bernard approaches, and Neville says: "'As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody - with whom? - with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question. Who am I?'" (71).

This introduces a conversation in which each speaks once, then Neville leaves, and Bernard talks to himself alone once more. At the end of this final monologue, he thinks of Louis, feels Louis watching, and even imagines something that Louis would say. This serves to introduce an interior monologue by Louis, his meditations in a London restaurant. He in turn thinks of both Bernard and Neville, as well as Jinny and Susan, concentrating on Susan. This leads to the meditations of Susan, who is out in the country. Susan in
turn ends thinking of Jinny and Rhoda: "'They dance in London. Jinny kisses Louis'" (86). It is immediately followed by the monologues of Jinny and Rhoda, showing their very different reactions to a party they are attending, and concluding this section.

The preceding elaborate analysis of one chapter in the novel has been attempted because the people's reflections on each other and their reactions to each other which contribute significantly to the depth of the picture are received by us through sensations. The College section provides good illustrations of the way The Waves presents the social milieu of the characters. For example, Bernard's closing private meditation contains his observation of activities of the boisterous element in the college and his reflection on how he and Neville, both aloof from it, would react to it differently, for the sensations felt by each are different:

'I feel, as I look from the window, parting the curtains, "That would give him no pleasure; but it rejoices me". (We use our friends to measure our own stature.) My scope embraces what Neville never reaches. They are shouting hunting-songs over the way. They are celebrating some run with the beagles. The little boys in caps who always turned at the same moment when the brake went round the corner are clapping each other on the shoulder and boasting. But Neville, delicately avoiding interference, stealthily, like a conspirator, hastens back to his room' (76-77).

Another aspect of social convention also realised through sensation is life in the business world. By his meditation Louis who now enjoys a responsible position shows what it is like and how he feels about it:

'twelve o'clock... is the hour when Miss Johnson brings me my letters in a wire tray. Upon these white sheets I indent my name.... I love punctually at ten to come into my room;
I love the purple glow of the dark mahogany; I love the table and its sharp edge; and the smooth-running drawers. I love the telephone with its lip stretched to my whisper, and the date on the wall; and the engagement book. Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres sharp at four-thirty' (142-143).

In this novel everything, whether it relates to the world of nature or to society, relates to some kind of individual experience, other experiences being mere reflections of the mind contracted into itself or expanded on things outside. The invisible and the internal world of each individual is expressed through deep fears and subliminal drives that motivate the various persons presented: Louis' fear of his colonial accent, Susan's yearnings for property, Rhoda's fear of social contacts, Jinny's antipathy to any binding commitment.

Bernard in his final retrospect trying to get at the meaning of life ties up all these sensations:

'Also I saw... the groups we had made, how they came together, how they ate together, how they met in this room or that. I saw my own indefatigable busyness - how I had rushed from one to the other, fetched and carried, travelled and returned, joined this group and that, here kissed, here withdrawn; always kept hard at it by some extraordinary purpose, with my nose to the ground like a dog on the scent; with an occasional toss of the head, an occasional cry of amazement, despair and then back again with my nose to the scent. What a litter - what a confusion; with here birth, here death; succulence and sweetness; effort and anguish; and myself always running hither and thither. Now it was done with. I had no more appetites to glut; no more stings in me with which to poison people; no more sharp teeth and clutching hands or desire to feel the pear and the grape and the sun beating down from the orchard wall' (244-245).

He ties up not only individual sensations, but also organises the total experiences of all the six characters. The assignment of this role to him is to maintain the musical structure of the novel.
There is an unmistakable link between Beethoven's work and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Quentin Bell intimates that in 1927, Leonard, who reviewed records for "The Nation", purchased a gramophone, and "Virginia, who had a fairly catholic taste, developed a particular interest in Beethoven's late quartets, and they assisted those meditations which resulted finally in *The Waves*." The entry dated December 22, 1930 in Virginia Woolf's *Diary* acknowledges this fact:

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

*The Waves* ends like Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, also known as the *Victory Symphony*. The brilliant busy finale of the novel, which denotes overwhelming victory, comes after some sentimental, slow movements, and thus contributes an added weight to the already mighty theme of effort.

Bernard's last words "O solitude" were changed to "'O Death!'", so as to reflect the dominance of the theme of effort which is rendered fully by the sentence that they terminate: "'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!'" (256). The closing words, separated from Bernard's last words and put in italics, are: "The waves broke on the shore" (256). This way, Joan Bennett points out, Virginia Woolf:

let the stress fall on her major theme and she sustained the pattern of the work, not only formally, by rounding this section in the same manner as the others, but also by
sustaining the idea of the continuity of nature and the transience of individual human lives.18

Life, for Virginia Woolf, every hour, every minute, is an undertaking, one which required effort, constant effort. The theme of trying, effort or struggle appears in her novels from the beginning. Early in Jacob's Room we read how:

Outside the rain poured down more directly and power­fully as the wind fell in the early hours of the morning. The aster was beaten to the earth. The child's bucket was half-full of rainwater; and the opal-shelled crab slowly circled round the bottom, trying with its weakly legs to climb the steep side; trying again and falling back, and trying again and again (12).

What is especially moving in such a description is the image of Man's own struggle which it brings to mind. This very image appears in Virginia Woolf's Diary in 1928:

How little one counts, I think: how little anyone counts; how fast and furious and masterly life is; and how all these thousands are swimming for dear life.19

In To the Lighthouse, it is one of Lily Briscoe's profoundest discoveries that "the vision must be perpetually remade" (206). But it is Bernard in The Waves who pears the theme of effort and constant trying so nobly and completely. We hear him muse:

'I jumped up. I said, "Fight! Fight!" I repeated. It is the effort and the struggle, it is the perpetual warfare, it is the shattering and piecing together - this is the daily battle, defeat or victory, the absorbing pursuit. The trees, scattered, put on order; the thick green of the leaves thinned itself to a dancing light. I netted them under with a sudden phrase. I retrieved them from formlessness with words' (232).

It seems as though Virginia Woolf had been developing the theme of effort right from the beginning as a sort of her philosophical credo which attains its full realisation
in the concluding two pages of *The Waves* as the elderly and exhausted Bernard sees a new day dawn in all its splendour and endeavours to raise himself up so as to greet it. He equates his desire with a horse on which he sits and together they will fight the common enemy. Theirs is the ultimate gesture and effort:

'What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. 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!' (256).

There is one more feature common between Beethoven's symphonies and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Dwelling on the contribution of Beethoven's symphonies to Wagner's conception of music-drama, A.J.B. Hutchings writes that Wagner's "music-drama proceeds on a scale like that of Beethoven's symphonies; it is not interrupted to accommodate choruses, ballets, airs, processions and marches. Instead there is endless melody, which is maintained by the orchestra when the contribution of the actors must be speech-like or declamatory." ²⁰

Bernard's monologue in *The Waves* is that uninterrupted, "endless melody" which is present in Beethoven's and Wagner's works. Even when others speak or declaim, we remain quite conscious of Bernard's voice in the background.

The fusion of the Percival theme with the main theme at the end is also noteworthy. A superb technician as she is, Virginia Woolf would not leave any of her notes unmerged. Percival never appears in the novel, but sits in the centre of things. He is the star round whom circle the
moths of Rhoda, Louis, Neville, Susan, Jinny, and Bernard. Image of courage and defiance, he contributes enormously to the growth of his six friends when he was alive and to their ripeness after he is dead. Though each one of the six friends acknowledges his magnificence and importance, it is Bernard, ultimately, through whom the full impact of the Percival leitmotif is brought home. Distancing himself from the life that surrounds him, Bernard muses and reaches the right conclusion that death is the real enemy who must be defied and conquered. Percival's death has shown to Bernard what is important in life.

Judging strictly by artistic criteria, The Waves must rank first among Virginia Woolf's works. Since it is without conventional plot, the moments assume great importance and they come one after another in profusion. The interrelation of parts within each section of the novel is carefully planned and integrated, just as is the overall structure. The confusion which a casual reader feels is only apparent, and it is owing to his inability to remember adequately what he has read so that he can see the relation of the various parts to each other and to the whole. The Waves requires several readings just as a great piece of music needs to be heard many times for full appreciation, or a great painting merits long contemplation. A study of the novel from the point of view of "significant form" also confirms the judgement that Virginia Woolf is a great artist. Life is hard to understand and if one accurately reflects on it, there will necessarily be
obscurities. The reader who demands that a novelist represent life clearly and simply, with all problems solved, is asking for an over-simplification. In fact, Virginia Woolf has depicted a world grown tired and suspicious of logic and formulae.

REFERENCES

1. Diary, p.102.
2. Ibid.
5. Ibid, pp.142-143.


17. *Diary*, p.162.

