"One World, One Life": The Politics of Personal Connection in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

by

Jocelyn Rodal

Submitted to the Department of Literature
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science in Literature
at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

June 2006

Signature of Author_____
Department of Literature
May 19, 2006

Certified by_____
Diana Henderson
Associate Professor of Literature
Thesis Supervisor

Certified by_____
Ruth Perry
Professor of Literature
Thesis Supervisor

Certified by_____
Shankar Raman
Associate Professor of Literature
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by_____
James Buzard
Chairman, Literature Department

Chapter One. "Together in Chorus, Shrill and Sharp": Political Implications of Collectivism in *The Waves*

"I hear a sound," said Rhoda, "cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down" (9). Thus Virginia Woolf introduces Rhoda in her opening to *The Waves*. But almost immediately, this sound is transformed: " 'The birds sang in chorus first,' said Rhoda. 'Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom window alone' " (10-11). While the birds were originally a unified, collective sound, "going up and down" as one, now they fly away as many, spreading like seeds that will eventually grow individually to create separate new lives. Rhoda implies that they sang as one only because they had no other choice – the door was barred, and they were jailed together. However, the single bird remaining by the window deep in song is a noteworthy figure. Like Rhoda, and human consciousness itself, it might be lonely or free, proudly individual or vulnerable in its solitude.

Shifting collectivity is a pervasive theme in *The Waves*, and people and objects alike display weighty links and distinctions as they merge with and reemerge from each other throughout the book. Indeed, despite its lack of human characters, the opening paragraph itself exhibits these problems of connection:

> The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.
>
> As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again. (7)

Before dawn – the creation of both this day and *The Waves* – "the sea was indistinguishable from the sky." The horizon lies dark, with the literal edge of the world melded directly into the empty space beyond it. Woolf's six individuals, yet unexpressed, are totally unindividualized, lying in the pregnant white space of an unwritten novel's empty pages as well as in Woolf's dark night seashore. Yet, as always, Woolf does not wait long before she illustrates exceptions and contradictions, complicating her own description of undifferentiated night unity. Within the same sentence, Woolf explains that the sea and sky do differ, because "the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it," while the sky was not.

As Woolf will come to identify her six human individuals with waves crashing upon the shore, so are these "wrinkles" the beginnings of waves – the beginnings of Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis. "Life emerges heaving its dark crest from the sea" (64). When light arrives, the distinction becomes clear: "gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky" (7). Woolf invents a black border – an actual outline dividing the blues of the sky and the ocean. Next the "wrinkles" thicken into "strokes," and they move "one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually" (7). Thus the waves, like Woolf's characters, separate into individual entities, and yet continue to move together, differentiating and following, merging and reemerging. "As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again" (7). Each of Woolf's human individuals, along with *The Waves* itself, live their lives as these waves, emerging from the nether-world of imagination, breaking upon the shore, and then receding back into the murky depths of

memory. Moreover, *The Waves* and its characters both live as multiple such waves as well, existing in a series of views and events that repeatedly materialize in idiosyncrasy, blend back into a greater unity of lived existence, and then surface again. Furthermore, the book and its human lives dawn like Woolf's seashore sunrise, living out their complicated existences and then finally sinking like the sun once more, so that again "sky and sea were indistinguishable" (236). The distinctions among all of these extended metaphors are blurred. *The Waves* resides in all these lands of differentiation and connection simultaneously, persistently articulating itself into exquisitely individual forms and then gladly diving back into the unity of undifferentiated connection.

The very nature of what constitutes individual forms becomes questionable. Woolf uses "individual" peculiarly in *The Waves*. Rhoda claims to "hate all details of the individual life" (105), and later she says, "I must go through the antics of the individual. I must start when you pluck at me with your children, your poems, your chilblains or whatever it is you do and suffer. But I am not deluded" (224). Bernard similarly identifies "the individual life" with the quotidian banality of the rush to enter a subway, while he considers his own larger, personal plans to get married as subsuming such an individual triviality (112). Now that his fiancé has accepted him, he wishes to "let fall my possessions, and merely stand here in the street, taking no part, watching the omnibuses, without desire, without envy," as though attempting to become one with all that surrounds him (112). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "individual" as "single, as distinct from others of the same kind; particular, special." However, Rhoda and Bernard use the word to signify the mundane and trivial concerns of life rather than any personal originality. They imply, by contrast, the existence of a larger potential oneness

of the world – a unity that can be joined only by letting go of irrelevantly individual thoughts as well as daily physical obligations in preference for a larger understanding.

As Jean Guiguet writes, "we can easily recognize in *The Waves* that favourite subject of Virginia Woolf's: the unity and multiplicity of personality, in its relations with the outside world of things and other people" (286-7). Woolf persistently identifies Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis all together throughout *The Waves* in a manner that is consistently collectivized rather than realistic, and the six friends become facets of personalities and visions of the world before and beyond any existence as people. The novel's basic form unifies them solidly and unchangeably within the artificial outer structure of what they "say." As Guiguet points out, this purportedly verbal expression "is neither the transcription nor even the translation into words of the inner life at the conscious or subconscious level... but what might be called, borrowing a formula from T. S. Eliot, its poetic correlative. By this I mean a way of writing, a style, which is essentially that of the writer, freed from any preoccupation with realism" (286). In a sense, Woolf denies her six "views" even voices of their own – as tiny children at the outset of the novel, they speak not as children but as poets. She articulates thoughts that cannot exist coherently: at one point, Bernard continues to "speak," lucidly describing himself and his surroundings, even after he has fallen asleep (235). Existing solely within the same rigid structure, openly expressed only through the voice that Woolf considered her own most mature poetic style, Woolf overtly denies her characters individuality – both in Rhoda and Bernard's sense, and also in our own. She wrote amusedly of one review: "Odd, that they (*The Times*) should praise my characters when I meant to have none" (*Diary IV*, 47). Instead, these pseudo-characters might be

considered facets of existence – pieces of personality, vision, and consciousness. As Woolf explained in one letter,

> The six characters were supposed to be one. I'm getting old myself – I shall be fifty next year; and I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feelings. Therefore I wanted to give the sense of continuity. (*Letters IV*, 397)

One might note that Woolf here herself refers to the six as characters, though she claims they do not exist as such. This speaks to their own complicated nature, both as characters in a novel, speakers in a poem, and parts of a single, more unified personality. All six echo each others' thoughts repeatedly, often in the same words, as though telepathically intertwined, or even so thoroughly connected as to exist without perceivable distinctions. In 1923, as she was drafting *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf posited another potential term: "Characters are to be merely views: personality must be avoided at all costs.... Directly you specify hair, age, &c something frivolous, or irrelevant, gets into the book" (*Diary II*, 264). At times Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis seem like separated individuals, and at other moments more like views with a mystical connection. They in fact fully inhabit both roles, and several others as well, and they defiantly refuse to submit to the designation of any single term.

When Woolf wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*, she was already articulating many of these problems of connected character, and the political implications of such rose readily to the surface. The famous early motorcar and aeroplane passage of *Mrs. Dalloway* articulates all of these problems of collectivity with clear political import, as the heterogeneous crowds of London become suddenly unified by a communal gaze, directed first at the old god of aristocracy passing in a car, and then at the new idol of capitalism in the

advertising plane overhead. Woolf deliberately melds the various social classes wandering the London streets via one collective concern: Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping and a working class accent, watches the passing motorcar with all the same fascination as the upper-class "little Mr. Bowley," who thinks condescendingly of "poor women waiting to see the Queen go past—poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War—tut tut" (20). The newly connected crowd subsumes the novel's main characters and unknown individuals alike. Here Woolf highlights the politically loaded nature of the symbols of leadership that create collectivity by associating both of them with World War I: the motorcar originally draws notice by backfiring with a "violent explosion" that causes passers-by to start ("oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!"), while the aeroplane first appears with a sound that "bored ominously into the ears" like a warplane (14, 13, 20). Confronted with the potential violence and exciting spectacle of the car and plane, and their associated sense of authority, the gazing passers-by are repeatedly identified as a single, unified crowd, then by individual names, and finally as a collectivized group yet again. This alternating description repeatedly emphasizes their simultaneous existence in collective and individual identities with rich consequent socioeconomic and political implications.

Critics have rightly recognized the political import of this passage and its association with human connection, as they have generally discerned within *Mrs. Dalloway* itself. John Young points out that the episode "invokes an important split along class lines" (100). Liesl Olson writes that these "intersecting points-of-view... contribute to the 'procession' of everyday life that all of the characters, regardless of class, experience.... The sky-writing airplane [and] the Prime Minister's motorcar...

thread through each pedestrian's personal narrative, even as each person's day is individually quite different" (26-7). More generally, Alex Zwerdling considers *Mrs. Dalloway* a fulfilling embodiment of "her ambition 'to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense' " (143).

All of these political concerns are present in *The Waves* as well, stemming from an even more extensive investigation of the essential trends of collectivity and individualism along with a wide variety of other sociopolitical problems. Woolf's interest in combining the political and the lyrical, the critical and the stylistic, is a common thread readily apparent in her entire body of writing, from the earlier *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Jacob's Room* through to *The Waves*. However, political tendencies in *The Waves* have been generally ignored in favor of its aesthetic qualities. Alex Zwerdling thoroughly demonstrates in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* that Woolf should be considered an emphatically political writer, but he pigeonholes *The Waves* in much the same manner that he correctly points out previous critics pigeonholed Woolf herself. Zwerdling argues that Woolf's writing has been ascribed to have a "delicate face" that "suggested refinement, esthetic withdrawal, a commitment to the contemplative rather than the active life," and he goes on to claim that *The Waves*, as a poetic attempt "to transform the language of fiction," "too easily turned into an insubstantial self without a world" (9, 11, 12).[1] Such a view of *The Waves* is traditional, and critics have usually

[1] Zwerdling's claim that *The Waves* is an experimental "pinnacle" but also a "dead-end" is similarly unfair (12). He writes that "Woolf felt no temptation to press beyond it in the same direction" (12), but in fact after *The Waves* was published Woolf wrote that "I am about to embody, at last, the exact shapes my brain holds," calling *The Waves* a "beginning" and "my first work in my own style" (*Diary IV*, 53). Woolf recorded her intention to "write another four novels: *Waves*, I mean," thus planning to continue further with the innovative form that she invented in *The Waves* (*Diary IV*, 63). Zwerdling claims that "the work of her final decade is almost entirely constructed of elements *The Waves* intentionally excludes," citing, among other examples, "historical specificity in *The Years*" and "intense political commitment in *Three Guineas*" (12). It is important to note, however, that *The Years* was originally drafted as an innovative combination

considered it poetically revolutionary but severely limited in terms of any relevance to sociopolitical reality.

More recently, several scholars have noted a number of the more grounded political concerns that *The Waves* articulates. The status of character and collectivity in *The Waves* can be linked to specific movements of Woolf's era. Ann Rhonchetti connects Woolf's blurred personalities specifically to controversial events of the 1920s and 30s: "questions of identity assumed greater urgency for Woolf in a postwar age in which civilization came to be viewed as tenuous and vulnerable, and human life subject to depersonalization and devaluation in an increasingly complex, mechanized culture" (92-3). Jane Marcus has associated the style and interconnectivity of *The Waves* with postwar problems of class, race, slavery, and the fall of imperialism. Marcus claims that "Woolf self-consciously creates here a literature of color, and that color is white." The very connectedness of the six white individuals exists via "imperialism and defining itself by the brown and black of colonized peoples," so that "while popular sentiment might declare that the sun never sets on the British empire, *The Waves* emphatically dramatizes the very historical moment in which the sun *does* set" (65, 81). In *Modernism and Mass Politics*, Michael Tratner ties the collectivity of *The Waves* with economics and government, arguing that Woolf was developing "a nonindividualist, collectivist psychology" that was "of particular value to socialist theory" (221). He states that Woolf aimed to create a personality of group consciousness – "a corporate personality that did not reside in any corporeal body"; in particular, Tratner asserts that this corporate personality is directly relevant to Woolf's specific politics – "to the British Labour Party

---

of novel and essay forms, thus intending to move beyond the accepted structure of "novel" with all the same experimental energy that characterizes *The Waves*. I will demonstrate the numerous and weighty political ties between *Three Guineas* and *The Waves* in Chapter Three.

and to socialism" (221). On the other hand, Gabrielle McIntire uses strikingly similar arguments to contend that the uniformity of personality and voice present in *The Waves* reacts instead to the 1930's movements of fascism and social control that Woolf ardently opposed. McIntire argues that Woolf uses the collective voice of *The Waves* to expose the alluring danger of "the fascist cult of personal magnetism" that aimed at "an absolute conflation of the individual with the nation" (36).

The variety of these critical arguments speaks to the versatile nature of *The Waves*, particularly salient if one considers that the book's reception has concentrated more on its artistic nature than any of its political statements. Such aesthetic analysis of *The Waves*' artistic nature is valid and necessary, and Woolf's poetic and formal experimentation with this "abstract mystical eyeless... playpoem" is striking indeed (Woolf, *Diary III*, 203). However, the work's political implications are also relevant and essential, and the controversial nature of these associated politics (in the 1930s and, in many cases, still today) indicates the potential import of such political critiques as might be read into the play-poem-novel. I would argue that Rhonchetti, Marcus, Tratner, and McIntire are all correct in their diverse arguments about the politics of *The Waves*, despite certain apparent contradictions among their conclusions, because Woolf uses the inventive poetic structure of *The Waves* to address all of these socioeconomic and political issues simultaneously. *The Waves* possesses the expansive quality of an epic, and mechanized industrial society, imperial tensions, socialist collectivism, and fascist oneness all appear together within a broader investigation of human consciousness.

If the arguments of Rhonchetti, Marcus, Tratner, and McIntire ever do become overextended, it is only because any effort to fit *The Waves* into a single coherent

framework or ideology is problematic, if not doomed from the start. It is difficult to locate any claim made by one voice in *The Waves* that is not elsewhere contradicted by another, and often even negated several times more. These contradictions do not dilute the arguments; rather, they underscore the controversial force of the questions involved. In the realm of *The Waves*, contradiction is an inherent element of existence. Any attempt to describe the unique trait of an individual wave must collapse as the wave falls back into the surrounding ocean, and similarly there is a natural contradiction involved in the effort to encapsulate particular personalities, views, or ideologies that emerge from the greater language of a single narrative voice in *The Waves*. Virginia Woolf addresses an all-encompassing variety of political issues and ideologies in *The Waves* via a broader network of conscious existence that shifts repeatedly from the collective to the individual in the book's system of connected narration.

As scholars like Tratner and McIntire have demonstrated, the political and aesthetic elements of *The Waves* are deeply intertwined. Moreover, Marcus, Tratner, Rhonchetti, and McIntire all concur in rightly arguing that problems of class, imperialism, and politics are centrally significant in *The Waves*. However, considering the formal arrangement of this experimental book, such a central presence of these contemporary issues seems strange. Here Woolf meticulously avoids almost any reference to place, time, or history. As she herself wrote, "I shall do away with exact place and time" (*Diary III*, 230). The Modernist concentration on a specific "now" disappears, as Woolf departs from the single-day narration of *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Between the Acts* in favor of her characters' entire lives. In 1925 Woolf declared in "Modern Fiction" that we must "not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is

commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small" (*Common Reader*, 213), yet in *The Waves* she seems to abandon that assertion in favor of the big – or perhaps in favor of "moments of being" so very small that they escape even the details and individual events that dominate her stream-of-consciousness novels like *Mrs. Dalloway*. While in the later *Between the Acts* Woolf provides the exact time of the story's embodiment ("this very moment, half past three on a June day in 1939") and in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" she dares to hazard a precise month ("on or about December, 1910") for a change in human nature, in *The Waves* Woolf scrupulously eschews not only dates but any concrete sense of time altogether (*Between the Acts*, 75; "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," 22). Indeed, the closest we ever come to a sense of Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis's placement in history might be a couple of allusions to English monarchs: Jinny mentions a portrait of Queen Alexandra, who reigned as queen consort from 1901 until 1910, and Neville refers to King George, who ruled from 1910 until 1936 (23, 228). Even these royal mentions are given decidedly without suffix; technically, King George might well refer to George I, II, III, IV, V, or now even VI, though George VI ruled after *The Waves* was published. Much of the politics that we might conventionally ascribe to Woolf's writing are lost along with this specific history and temporality. World War I is absent from *The Waves*, though it held such prominence in novels such as *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, as well as in Woolf's essays and her own life.

Woolf aimed at an overarching sense of consciousness and human nature in *The Waves*, which might explain the work's aversion to any limiting historical placement. Indeed, Woolf subtitled her first draft "The Life of Anybody," and specific times and

events, though they might flesh out the lives of Clarissa Dalloway or Miss LaTrobe, could undermine the generality of character in *The Waves*. However, given that Woolf avoided World War I in *The Waves* in favor of broader human experience, her persistent inclusion of imperialism, militarism, and nationality here becomes even more noteworthy. Apparently specific wars are not part of general human existence, but militarism is. While Woolf avoids precisely locating her characters in terms of where they live, she does not mind describing the English domination of India, and the characters still concern themselves with "the fate of Europe" and "the Oriental problem" (228, 136). Woolf implies that (at least in Europe) violent forms of governance and imperialism are fundamental to human nature.

The text repeatedly highlights the dominion of Europe over distant, colonized lands. Percival's imperialist voyage to India and his subsequent destruction there form the very center of *The Waves*, in terms of the reactions of the other six, the structure of the book, and even, as Michael Tratner points out, the precise page numbers of the original edition (223). Gabrielle McIntire places Rhoda's suicide as a jump from the precipice of Gibraltar – "a site that rests, quite significantly, on the cusp of Europe and its empire" (42). Thus Rhoda's death mirrors the destruction inherent in imperialism and continental conflict. The fact that Rhoda causes her own demise might only reinforce the ubiquity of oppression: both the dominator and the victim are present within all of us. Indeed, there is a general attention to travel in *The Waves*, an odd fact given that while we never get a precise idea of where in England the characters generally reside, we do get detailed descriptions of Bernard's tours in Italy and Rhoda's in Spain, along with vivid imaginings of India and Africa. The vagueness with respect to location in general is

clearly deliberate and emphasized: "Bernard and Neville, Percival, Archie, Larpent and Baker go to Oxford or Cambridge, to Edinburgh, Rome, Paris, Berlin, or to some American University. I go vaguely" (65). Rather than concisely stating his own and others' locations, which would require fewer words and less effort, Louis here goes out of his way to say that such details do not matter. The "where" is irrelevant. On the other hand, the imperialistic tendencies connected to travel and distant location remain prominent in *The Waves*. When Bernard visits Italy, he never refers to it by that national name, but always as Rome, with all its connotations of great historical empire. Indeed, the Roman practice of taming of surrounding lands is not lost on Bernard, from the quotidian to the violent: "Imagine the leagues of level land and the aqueducts and the broken Roman pavement and tombstones in the Campagna, and beyond the Campagna, the sea, then again more land, then the sea" (187-8).

Woolf thus ties trends of imperialism within Europe together with European expansion to more distant lands. She was aware of the irony of considering Italy in particular at the time, having so recently condemned Mussolini's expansive militarism in *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, a text which she was writing simultaneously with drafts of *The Waves*. Woolf also involves more distant intra-European expansionism when she mentions the long past Battle of Blenheim, upon which Neville believes that the fate of all Europe depends (228). Before Europe's imperialism spread to outside lands, the same pattern raged within the continent.

The abundant levels of violent power and conflict in *The Waves* reinforce a sense of the ubiquity of human attempts to conquer and control. On a smaller scale, imperialistic tendencies are visibly apparent in the six friends' constant insecurities with

and without each other as a larger group. Early in the book, the roles imposed upon the characters by school life and authority figures are repeatedly associated with military roles. Settling into his position at a new school, Louis describes how "now we march, two by two... orderly, processional.... I like the orderly progress. We file in; we seat ourselves. We put off our distinctions as we enter.... Dr. Crane mounts the pulpit.... I rejoice; my heart expands in his bulk, in his authority" (34). As the hero of the schoolyard, Percival too becomes a military leader: "His magnificence is that of some mediaeval commander. A wake of light seems to lie on the grass behind him. Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep" (37). Percival's own European status further underscores his power, and reconnects to the sense of European imperialism and fascism: Percival's features are decidedly Aryan, with blue eyes and a "straight nose," and Woolf writes that "he should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours. He is allied with the Latin phrases on the memorial brasses" (36). Again, the violence of the schoolyard connects to the language of the Roman Empire.

Furthermore, the simple relationships that form and dissolve among the six friends throughout their lives are themselves associated with comparable violence, as the friends alternately pursue and exclude each other with great potential cruelty. Louis's chained beast, presumably an Indian or African elephant, stomps impotently throughout the book. When characters feel out of place or unwanted, they continually associate such feelings with the violent sensations of war. Struggling to succeed within the social order, the friends repeatedly speak of the effort to "conquer" (Louis, 26; Rhoda, 56; Neville, 60).

The descriptive interludes between chapters contain similar references to imperialism and violent, warlike behavior, though they purportedly describe only simple, natural scenes by the English seashore, and are told through the voice of the book's elusive narrator rather than the friends' soliloquies. The birds of the interludes act alternately in unison and apart, "now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky" (73). Their song "together in chorus, shrill and sharp," carries a weighty potential of disturbing discord (73). Like the inculcated schoolboys, they become uniform when faced with the danger of greater, more powerful beings: "they swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this instant" (73). Like the human voices of *The Waves*, the birds are violently competitive in their basic social interactions: "they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they chased each other, escaping, pursuing, pecking each other" (73-4). The birds sing musically, as a shadow of the beauty of art and culture, but they are also violent, competitive, and warlike. With their prey, they are vicious: "one of them... accurately alighting, spiked the soft, monstrous body of the defenseless worm, pecked again and yet again, and left it to fester" (74). Even the rolling water itself exhibits this kind of violence, and in a manner that is specifically tied to imperialist culture clash, when Woolf writes that "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" (75). These images recall militarism, fascism, and imperialism. The existence of such violence in the natural world indicates

the scope that Woolf attaches to these human problems, as well as enabling *The Waves* to consider in a broader context the degree to which such tendencies are innate or societal. This political presence in the artistic and lyrical interludes, which might otherwise seem totally removed from concrete human life, underscores the ubiquity of societal issues in *The Waves* and the manner in which Woolf deliberately integrates the poetic and political elements of this experimental book.

Virginia Woolf draws a strong thread of violence and victimization throughout *The Waves* that interweaves consistently with a second thread of human connection. At times, this thread of connection is a sign of hope – a transcendental understanding and a potentially socialist collectivity. However, in other moments the thread of connection turns ominous, becoming an overbearing regime that eclipses personal idiosyncrasy. But whether helpful or oppressive, this human collectivity alternately and persistently both supports and opposes the violent tendencies of *The Waves*. The implications of these woven strands are decidedly controversial, political, and relevant, speaking to the issues of human psychology, history, and society that are essential to Woolf's own era as well as to our own. By addressing these issues in such a lyrical and experimental text, Woolf involves questions of the nature of art as well. The very problem of where literature belongs in relation to the real world is at issue here.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to demonstrate that the varied political concerns present in *The Waves* are more numerous, contradictory, and expansive than critics have previously acknowledged. In my second chapter, I will examine the extensive and complicated variety of imperialist, militarist, fascist, classist, and racist tensions that surface in the small-scale, personal interactions of *The Waves*, particularly as manifested

in the loner image of Rhoda on the one hand the leader role of Percival on the other. In my third chapter, I will consider *The Waves* and *Three Guineas* together to demonstrate that the political and stylistic innovations of *The Waves* fit well within the larger trends of Virginia Woolf's body of writing. I aim to reclaim *The Waves* as a political text, like the rest of Woolf's work. *The Waves*'s experimental and lyrical qualities are not impediments to the grounded relevance of the work, but rather elements that increase the enormous breadth and import of the book's implications.

Chapter Two. Rhoda's Victimization, Percival's Imperialism: The Politics of Personal Exclusion and Friendly Leadership in *The Waves*.

Political dilemmas of social control and domination repeatedly play out as personal matters of friendship and community in *The Waves*. Just as the descriptive seaside interludes mirror the lives of Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis, so do the lives of these six friends mirror the progress and controversies of our own turbulent world. In the microcosm of a society formed by the personalities of *The Waves*, there are evident winners and losers. With her constant social exclusion and despair, Rhoda might emblematize society's outsiders and victims. Meanwhile, before his death Percival embodies the opposing extreme of social success, coming to be loved and revered by the others so fully that he could utilize his social power however he might choose, violently or otherwise. Viewing the six voices' responses to these antithetical figures, the politics of *The Waves* becomes increasingly conspicuous and relevant. Rhoda's loneliness and Percival's leadership, along with the complicated social interactions of the other five "views," demonstrate both the potential violence and the insinuating, personal draws of fascist and imperialist politics.

Rhoda's simultaneous longing for and revulsion at unifying human relationships offers a critical case study in the allures and dangers of collectivism. In numerous ways Rhoda stands outside the group, solitary and apart from the thoughts of others. All six of Woolf's primary characters in *The Waves* feel lonely at times, and characters like Louis and Susan often define themselves by such a sense of apartness. However, Louis, Susan, Neville, Jinny, and Bernard live and collaborate with others on a level that Rhoda either

never chooses or never becomes able to reach herself. The other five individuals grow into roles of their own and operate within society into their old age, while Rhoda's adult life is more amorphous and ill-defined, and she never feels that she has secured a solid place for herself. Rhoda takes her own life early, thus physically, mentally, and spiritually cutting herself off irrevocably from her friends.

Woolf illustrates Rhoda's peculiar isolation early on when Louis describes a childhood game:

> Up here Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan (but not Rhoda) skim the flower-beds with their nets. They skim the butterflies from the nodding tops of the flowers. They brush the surface of the world. Their nets are full of fluttering wings. 'Louis! Louis! Louis!' they shout. But they cannot see me. I am on the other side of the hedge. There are only little eyeholes among the leaves. Oh, Lord let them pass.... Let me be unseen. I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk. I press the stalk. A drop grows larger and larger. Now something pink passes the eyehole. Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. She has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered. (12-13)

Here Louis, too, feels separated from the group at the outset. He hides deliberately behind a hedge, hoping to go unseen. He envisions himself as a green stalk rather than a human being, which would separate him entirely from the other four, making him not merely the person unnoticed behind the hedge, but the hedge itself. The others would likely consider such a hedge or stalk a mere object, unworthy of seeking out – unlike the human Louis, whom they do watch and search for. However, Louis does not remain invisible for long. Shortly an "eyebeam" strikes him, and once more he is "a boy in a grey flannel suit." Then "I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered." Louis not only reenters the social world at the end of this passage, but also

develops (willingly or no) a new, physically social connection with Jinny that Susan explicitly envies: "I saw them, Jinny and Louis, kissing. Now I will wrap my agony inside my pocket-handkerchief" (13). Indeed, with this kiss Louis and Jinny achieve a level of intimacy that the others probably will not experience for years to come.

As Louis regains human connection, Rhoda remains forgotten. Her exclusion here is explicit. Woolf deliberately highlights Rhoda's exceptionality, enclosing her apart in parentheses: "Bernard, Neville, Jinny and Susan (but not Rhoda) skim the flower-beds." The other children call for Louis, but not for Rhoda. While Louis shortly reenters the group, Rhoda does not, and indeed the reader does not know where she might be. Jinny mentions her once, but in such a manner as to imply that she is solitary: "I ran past Susan, past Rhoda, and Neville and Bernard in the tool-house talking" (13). Neville and Bernard converse, Jinny and Louis kiss, Susan watches, and then she and Bernard speak. All five are somehow caught up in this childhood dance of shifting alliances. Even when alone, they tend to watch each other intently: Louis examines the other five, Jinny sees him, Susan watches both, and then Bernard regards her. The power of such (potentially Foucauldian) gazes to influence connections between the characters is essential as they form their identities with and apart from the others. Rhoda, however, remains entirely separate: even the reader, with access to the combined views of all five other individuals, is unsure where Rhoda resides as this episode occurs. When we finally hear from her again, she is alone, playing with her petals in a basin (18). In fact, throughout the chapter every time the reader sees Rhoda she is apparently isolated from the other five, and when other characters notice her it is limited to conversational musings and casual observations as they move past and beyond her. In this opening

chapter Rhoda never directly interacts or talks with the other children (except perhaps at the very outset, when it is unclear whether anyone is speaking *to* anyone else).

Furthermore, Rhoda develops more in common with the flowerbeds and butterflies that the others skim using nets than she does with the other children. As Susan says, Rhoda's eyes "are like those pale flowers to which moths come in the evening" (16). Throughout *The Waves*, Rhoda connects with wings, birds, moths, and butterflies. Her opening lines concern birdsong (9), she herself claims to be "blown like a feather" (64), and Louis says that "her shoulder-blades meet across her back like the wings of a small butterfly" (22). Even in suicide, Rhoda apparently leaps from a cliff, as though flying into oblivion. Thus Woolf identifies Rhoda with the flowers that the children scrape off and with the light, winged creatures that they pursue and capture rather than with the children themselves. Given such identifications, one understands why Rhoda might dread human interactions, dreaming instead of flying "above the earth" (27) and rising "on spring-heeled boots over the tree-tops" (28). Drawn back to earth, Rhoda feels that "they sweep me between their great shoulders; I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched... with people pursuing, pursuing" (28).

The implications of this pattern are disturbing. When Louis describes the other children chasing butterflies, he says that they "brush the surface of the world" (12). The phrase might merely describe them tangibly exploring their earth's physicality as children. On the other hand, covering the world chasing, pursuing, and capturing defenseless creatures also carries parallels to imperial exploration, conquest and expansion over the globe's surface. Certainly, Rhoda's fear that she is being pursued like a butterfly does not bode well for the harmlessness of such activity, and the constant

presence of foreboding imperialism elsewhere in *The Waves* increases the ominous implications for any pursuit that involves skimming the earth's surface with tools that capture. The activity, though it seems an innocent, socialized children's game, automatically excludes and victimizes the butterflies and Rhoda, so that the distinction between harmless pursuit and destructive conquest becomes unclear.

Other moments in this opening chapter emphasize the involvement of personal relations with the demands of a controlling and imperialistic society. Louis says, "Jinny and Susan, Bernard and Neville bind themselves into a thong with which to lash me. They laugh... at my Australian accent. I will now try to imitate Bernard softly lisping Latin" (20). Here the other four children band together into a unified group, but only to become a weapon against Louis. Louis's accent is partly a mere marker, distinguishing him from the fused collective. However, it also marks him as second class in an imperialist sense – an Australian colonial to be ruled (and lashed) by the English around him. This second sense is indicated by Louis's desire not merely to fit in within the English language, but to bolster his ties to traditional European discourse, as in his attempt to mimic Bernard's Latin "lisp."

Bernard, in turn, reflects upon similar societal power issues. When Mrs. Constable (their childhood embodiment of a constable's policing power) tells Bernard to brush his hair and thus submit to the ordered demands of society, Bernard instead considers a fly caught in a web. He asks himself, "Shall I free the fly? Shall I let the fly be eaten?" but the reader never learns the trapped fly's fate. Instead, the conclusion concerns Bernard's disordered state within society: "So I am late as always. My hair is unbrushed and these chips of wood stick in it" (15). Bernard's consideration of the

captured fly's fate cements his own inability to assimilate into the culture of control. Yet the system of shifting power and domination is so ubiquitous here that even as he resists the demand, Bernard himself becomes another sort of symbolic controller, capturing inanimate bits of wood that "stick" to him as the fly adheres helplessly to the web. Moreover, as a securely upper-class English boy, Bernard retains the structural right to engage with power on both levels. Those perceived as "outsiders" (Louis, Rhoda) are not afforded such a luxury.

This first chapter persistently associates destruction with colonized lands. Neville writes that "the big blade is an emperor; the broken blade a Negro" (19). On the one hand, such a statement exemplifies the devastation of colonial rule and the imperial yoke. On the other hand, it marks foreign races as helplessly ineffectual, so that they might seem inherently broken rather than victimized by imperial rule. Either way, the remark underlines an association between colonized lands and their own ruin, and similar links appear throughout *The Waves*. When Rhoda imagines a foreign desert, she quickly says, "the other painfully stumbles among hot stones in the desert. It will die in the desert" (21). Thus she shifts swiftly from envisioning this exotic setting to connecting it with death and destruction. In particular, it is the other (the Other, outsider, foreign, and colonized) that will die. Meanwhile, as Bernard imagines:

> We are in a swamp now; in a malarial jungle. There is an elephant white with maggots, killed by an arrow shot dead in its eye. The bright eyes of hopping-birds—eagles, vultures—are apparent. They take us for fallen trees. They pick at a worm—that is a hooded cobra—and leave it with a festering brown scar to be mauled by lions. This is our world.... We are giants, lying here, who can make forests quiver. (23)

From the outset and repeatedly thereafter, this vision of an exotic, colonized land (vaguely resembling British India), is persistently plagued by decaying ruin. The jungle is malarial, the elephant is dead and covered by maggots: the pattern continues. The chapter's six children growing up in England clearly connect foreign, imperial lands with destruction, though whether they blame imperialism or the lands themselves is not always clear.

Within his Indian landscape, Bernard presumes ownership of "our" world, imagining himself a giant "who can make forests quiver." As an English child but also a social outsider, Rhoda's position is more complex and potentially unstable. When Rhoda imagines a foreign desert, she does not envision herself in a position of power as Bernard does: rather, she identifies with the stumbling, colonized subject who has been left to die. Yet despite being repeatedly cut off from the others and possibly victimized by them, Rhoda is by no means free from such potentially destructive imperial and militarist associations herself. When Rhoda floats her soft white petals in a brown basin, she refers to them as a "fleet" and even as "Armadas" (18, 27). She considers the violence of a "drowning sailor," and says that "Some will founder. Some will dash themselves against the cliffs" (18, 19). When Rhoda identifies one ship which sails alone as her own, its fate is unclear: "They have scattered, they have foundered, all except my ship which mounts the wave and sweeps before the gale and reaches the islands where the parrots chatter and the creepers..." (19). Rhoda trails off in an ellipsis. Her ship has reached an exotic land with singing parrots, but its destiny there is unknown. This too might be a tropical land beset by devastation. The ship may yet founder. Previously, its fate had been proud, as the single ship to escape a wreck at sea, but just as it might land and celebrate, Rhoda

drifts away rather than explain or dwell on such a success. As with the bird that Rhoda identifies at the outset of the novel, "singing by the bedroom window alone," the reader is left without guidance to decide whether the ship might be proud or lonely, successful or doomed in its solitude. However, the death connected with conquest elsewhere in *The Waves* does not bode well for that single ship, nor Rhoda herself, floating alone within it.

Rhoda's fleets tie to the games that Bernard and Neville play simultaneously, though apart from her, in the tool-shed. As she floats her ships on strange seas, Bernard and Neville construct boats of their own using knives. As mentioned previously, these knives conjure disturbing possibilities of imperialism when Neville says that "the big blade is an emperor; the broken blade a Negro" (19). Aside from potentially associating Rhoda with imperialism along with the rest of the children, this maritime activity does tie Rhoda to the others, creating a moment of possible unity. Indeed, the symptoms of such unification are quickly demonstrated when, immediately thereafter, all six characters are called to attention by the larger, controlling social force that dominates them: "Now the bell rings and we shall be late. Now we must drop our toys. Now we must go in together. The copy-books are laid out side by side on the green baize table" (19). Once more, all six individuals act as one.

Yet even this connection does not last long for Rhoda. Shortly thereafter she is excluded once more when she finds herself unable to follow the lesson that the others seem to consider so easy. Soon "the others are allowed to go. They slam the door. Miss Hudson goes" (21). Not only emotionally, but physically and intellectually, Rhoda is alone again. Moreover, this separation intensifies when the chapter itself ends with Rhoda's further geographical separation from the others. Rhoda's aunt comes to retrieve

her, and though she attempts to fly away, escaping the adults as well as the other children, they pull her back to earth and drive her away in their corporeal carriage, "with people pursuing, pursuing" (28).

Rhoda's terror of other human beings – especially when organized as larger groups – continues throughout *The Waves*. Walking down a city street as an adult, she writes: "Reckless and random the cars race and roar and hunt us to death like bloodhounds. I am alone in a hostile world. The human face is hideous" (159). Speaking of meeting with her friends, she says, "I fear, I hate, I love, I envy and despise you, but I never join you happily" (222). Rhoda does form a connection with Louis, becoming his lover and speaking intimately with him at both dinner parties, but she nevertheless qualifies even this more particular relationship: "I left Louis; I feared embraces" (204-5). Indeed, for Rhoda both the collective and the individual human face cause dismay. Feeling out of place at one such dinner party, Rhoda compares her friends to bloody war makers when they approach her to socialize:

> They emerge into the moonlight, like the relics of an army, our representatives, going every night (here or in Greece) to battle, and coming back every night with their wounds, their ravaged faces. Now light falls on them again. They have faces. They become Susan and Bernard, Jinny and Neville, people we know. Now what a shrinkage takes place! Now what a shriveling, what an humiliation! The old shivers run through me, hatred and terror, as I feel myself grappled to one spot by these hooks they cast on us; these greetings, recognitions, pluckings of the finger and searchings of the eyes. (231-2)

On the one hand, Rhoda so deeply dreads socialization that she compares the movements of a dinner party with those of war. Yet on the other hand, when Rhoda recognizes her friends once more as "people we know," she considers it "a shrinkage," as though her terrible description of "their wounds, their ravaged faces" was actually a positive

imagining, preferable to the reality before her. Her true terrors are not of any battle – "(here or in Greece)" it matters not – but rather of "these greetings, recognitions." Despite her open recognition of associated blood and destruction, Rhoda endows her militaristic imagining with a certain fantastical glory. She associates it with her friends and society via the violence that she attaches to both, but then she retreats into the imagining itself as a comfort against the mundane "pluckings of the finger and searchings of the eyes."

Rhoda's dread and skepticism of others can become terrifying. At one dinner party, she says of her old friends that "After all these pluckings and searchings, I shall fall alone through this thin sheet into gulfs of fire. And you will not help me. More cruel than the old torturers you will let me fall, and will tear me to pieces when I am fallen" (224). Yet Rhoda's friends are involved and aware enough to sense some of her dread. Louis says that "We wake her. We torture her" (120). Bernard says, "Rhoda loves to be alone. She fears us because we shatter the sense of being which is so extreme in solitude—see how she grasps her fork—her weapon against us" (133). Indeed, the other five all notice the ways that Rhoda shrinks from human contact. Susan notes Rhoda's "surprise" at recognition, and she describes "Rhoda's strange communications when she looks past us, over our shoulders" (121, 98). Neville calls Rhoda "some fasting and anguished spirit," saying that for her "it is not enough to wait for the thing to be said... making character; to perceive, suddenly, some group in outline against the sky" (197). Bernard knows that she is "always so furtive" with others (281). Such recognitions on their part might exhibit exactly the invasive connection that Rhoda fears. Yet such human understanding might also indicate bonds that are deeper and less superficial than

she realizes. The friends' acute perceptions regarding Rhoda's fears seem honest and caring, as though emblematic of more innocent, purely personal relationships, detached from the victimizing power dynamics of larger-scale political domination.

Yet Woolf makes it difficult to draw categorical conclusions, and relationships repeatedly shift between the personal and the political, persistently blurring distinctions. Rhoda's fear of human socializing shifts complicatedly. In the first half of *The Waves*, she regularly avoids human eye contact, always hiding in her fear of recognition at parties and gatherings. However, at the second dinner meeting, she says, "I did not hide... I walked straight up to you instead of circling round to avoid the shock of sensation as I used" (222). Rhoda explains that this "is only that I have taught my body to do a certain trick. Inwardly I am not taught," yet it nonetheless represents an enormous change in her capacity to interact with the others. Moreover, the fact that she would feel the need to teach herself such a "trick" is emblematic of the power of the societal role she knows is demanded from her by the outside: Rhoda would still rather hide from the others, but she knows that she must endeavor not to appear an outsider. Even when Rhoda avoided recognition earlier on, her reactions were complex:

> "I shall edge behind them," said Rhoda, "as if I saw some one I know. But I know no one. I shall twitch the curtain and look at the moon. Draughts of oblivion shall quench my agitation. The door opens; the tiger leaps. The door opens; terror rushes in; terror upon terror, pursuing me. Let me visit furtively the treasures I have laid apart. Pools lie on the other side of the world reflecting marble columns. The swallow dips her wing in dark pools. But here the door opens and people come; they come towards me. Throwing faint smiles to mask their cruelty, their indifference, they seize me.... I must take his hand; I must answer.... I see out of the window over his shoulder some unembarrassed cat, not drowned in light, not trapped in silk, free to pause, to stretch, and to move again. I hate all details of the individual life." (105)

Clearly here Rhoda dreads human interaction. Building on the same larger theme of destructive Indian imagery, she ties people entering through the doors with the pouncing leap of a hunting tiger – "terror upon terror, pursuing me." Yet when she then imagines more solitary existences, they are equally disturbing. Fingering the curtain to find a moment alone, her solitude brings relief in "drafts of oblivion," as though Rhoda enjoys the privacy only because it enables her to consider suicide. When she imagines how "the swallow dips her wing in dark pools" it preludes her own flying watery death. As Woolf persistently identifies Rhoda with birds and flight throughout *The Waves*, Rhoda naturally becomes this swallow as well, dipping her wings in the dark pools of a suicide plan that she flirts with repeatedly throughout the novel. The fact that Rhoda refers to these imaginings as "treasures" only makes the trend more disturbing.

Rhoda's imaginings complexify further when she describes the proudly isolated cat. She watches this solitary creature with apparent envy, saying that "not trapped in silk," it is "free to pause, to stretch." Yet she immediately concludes: "I hate all details of the individual life." The lone cat seems individual if nothing else as it roams independent out the window, free from the social party that traps Rhoda. That Rhoda would confess both envy and hatred for the cat is emblematic of her general ambiguous relation to solitude. As I have previously noted, Woolf repeatedly uses "individual" in *The Waves* to indicate the trivial personal details of life, rather than any meaningful uniqueness belonging to particular people, as though all lines and differentiations drawn between people amount to meaningless particulars rather than genuine differences. In spite of all her hatred for daily human interaction, Rhoda also scorns the "individual" in preference for this larger human collectivity displayed by *The Waves*. Rhoda is horrified by people

and fears friendship, but she longs for human connection. The particular forms of collectivity are all too often redolent of a larger imperial and social violence that Rhoda dreads, but the promise of genuinely intimate bonds beyond the self nonetheless attracts her.

The Waves's fascination with the ambiguous implications of collectivity is most apparent in the two dinner parties that twice bring the book's varied voices together both physically and spiritually during their adult lives. These dinner parties recall the socialite party of *Mrs. Dalloway* as well as the dinner gathering of *To the Lighthouse*, both of which Woolf elevated as moments of transcendent human connection. Indeed, Mrs. Dalloway explains that parties embody her "transcendental theory" of collectivism and life itself (153):

> What did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create. (122)

Clarissa Dalloway actually considers her human gatherings equivalent to the meaning of life. The significance that the voices of *The Waves* confer upon their own dinner parties implies the same conclusion. Rhoda calls the resulting connectedness a "momentary alleviation (it is not often that one has no anxiety) when the walls of the mind become transparent" – and for Rhoda, such a description is uncharacteristically exulting (228). Nor is she alone in this sentiment. Louis evokes a bodily and spiritual collective:

> The circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring. Something is made. Yes, as we rise and fidget, a little nervously, we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling, "Do not move, do not let the swing-door cut to

> pieces the thing that we have made, that globes itself here, among these lights, these peelings, this litter of bread crumbs and people passing. Do not move, do not go. Hold it forever." (145)

And Bernard similarly describes the second party as merging them all into one cohesive entity, "a six-sided flower; made of six lives," and again he tries to freeze this living moment in time, saying, "Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life" (229). For all six personalities, the dinner parties form a perfect human connection that they never succeed in creating elsewhere, and although a variety of discords mark the beginnings of both parties, by the time the friends part they have achieved the supreme form of collectivity.

But the manner by which the friends arrive at this absolute connection remains questionable and politically charged. The first dinner gathering forms around Percival, and he is the acknowledged sole cause, leader, and god of the party. Jinny speaks of a "globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again" (145). Thus she equates Percival with the globe that is the earth itself. Without a trace of metaphor or hyperbole on his part, Bernard calls Percival "a God" (136). This elevation is disturbing, because it thoroughly subsumes the individuality of all the other personalities into a single crowd that idolatrously worships a man who is the book's single greatest embodiment of imperialism, authoritarianism, militarism, and violence. Percival is the group's singular hero, and he gives his life to support the British domination of India. Louis compares him to a "mediaeval commander," while Neville calls him "brutal in the extreme"(37, 39). Upon Percival's arrival, Neville says that "all oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has

imposed order. Knives cut again" (122). These enormous claims call to mind the ominously undeliverable promises of fascism, and indeed Gabrielle McIntire points out that Woolf commented on "the almost pathological orderliness of Rome" under Mussolini when she visited the nation in 1927 (McIntire, 36). As Michael Tratner writes, "by following Percival, these people accept the metaphorical 'dog collar[s]' Woolf described in *Three Guineas*, letting 'For God and Empire' be written around their necks" (224).

Images of this kind of violent leadership are not solely Percival's preserve. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given what we have seen of Rhoda's discomfort with her own quotidian social suppression, Rhoda imagines assuming the same sort of domination herself:

> As I wash, as I bend my head down over the basin, I will let the Russian Empress's veil flow about my shoulders. The diamonds of the Imperial crown blaze on my forehead. I hear the roar of the hostile mob as I step out on to the balcony. Now I dry my hands, vigorously, so that Miss, whose name I forget, cannot suspect that I am waving my fist at an infuriated mob. 'I am your empress, people.' My attitude is one of defiance. I am fearless. I conquer. (56)

The vision is explicitly violent and oppressive, as Rhoda brandishes her fist and and threatens to "conquer" the "mob" below. At least in her dreams, Rhoda participates in unjust social dominance that Percival most clearly represents. However, in her case this remains a mere fantasy: "this is a thin dream. This is a papery tree. Miss Lambert blows it down" (56)[2]. Only Percival travels abroad to assume the cloak of imperial authoritarianism, while the other characters repeatedly but powerlessly imagine it.

[2] Notably, while Rhoda envisions herself as an empress she is unable to remember Miss Lambert's name ("Miss, whose name I forget"), even though only a few lines later when the reverie is broken she knows the name perfectly well. This sudden and uncharacteristic forgetfulness on Rhoda's part serves in part to

Yet the imperial imagination is hollow, for Percival dies almost immediately upon arrival in India. *The Waves* elevates Percival as the personal hero of the six friends, and this elevation extends to those friends' repeatedly presumptuous, imperialist, and racist imaginings of him in India and colonized lands. He is the exulted means for the glorious community created by the first dinner party, and this party itself benefits from the dubious promise of imperialism, for without his voyage to India, the farewell dinner would never occur. However, with Percival's death *The Waves* refuses to endorse the reality of imperialist domination. Exotic colonial imaginings are common, and even the larger narrative voice takes advantage of their potentially racist spectacle in the interludes, but *The Waves* emphatically rejects the reality of imperialism, rightly gesturing towards the necessary fall of the British empire that had already begun in 1931.

It is important to note that *The Waves*'s innumerable romanticized colonial imaginings have weighty implications, perhaps most far-reachingly in the interludes. "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" (75). Today, such an amalgamation of stereotypes of the savage native reads as racist, and since the description occurs in an interlude, the prejudice cannot be assigned to any of the book's six voices. Rather, the responsibility falls on Woolf herself, or perhaps on the generalized societal outlook that the larger narrator might embody. It is difficult to know precisely what connotations these stereotypical images would have

---

diminish Miss Lambert's symbolic authority within the dream, but it is also indicative of the bungling ignorance and inappropriate presumption that Woolf attaches to leadership and power in *The Waves*. Percival, the supreme leader and imperialist, is similarly mentally absent, with "inexpressive eyes" and "pagan indifference" (36). Bernard is continually late and losing track of himself, and it is he who inherits the power of narrative control and symbolic leadership after Percival's death. Woolf implicitly criticizes authoritarian power by giving her most effective leaders the absentminded qualities of buffoons.

carried in 1931, but it seems a reasonable assumption that Woolf did not mean them to sound racist in the manner that they do to modern ears, though she was romanticizing tribal warfare for poetic spectacle and effect. The racial and imperial clash illustrated here does appear deliberate, as "turbaned warriors... advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep," for it is the *white* sheep that are "feeding" upon India and Africa. Indeed, since Woolf identifies the rolling waters with native lands in other interludes as well (109, 150), we could read the waves crashing against the shore as emblematic in general of conflict between native and European cultures. Since the waves will never stop coming, the natural conclusion is that cultural conflict will never end. Even if imperialism fails with Percival's death, Woolf implies that some form of war will continue.

Percival dies not gloriously "in battle" as Louis anticipated, but rather foolishly by falling off his own horse (37). The accident recalls the aunt in *A Room of One's Own*, who "died by a fall from her horse when she was riding out to take the air in Bombay" (37). This aunt acts as a prop for the Mary Beton's advancement – she appears in the essay only because her death endows the narrator with five hundred pounds a year. We might ask ourselves whether the six friends inherit advantages of their own upon Percival's death. Doubtless, their mourning is intense, with echoes and repercussions throughout the remainder of *The Waves*, and their devastation is indicative of the immensely powerful sway that Percival had held over the group. For Neville "all is over," and he demands that pain "tear me asunder, I sob, I sob" (151, 152). As Michael Tratner points out, Percival's death very literally tears the six friends asunder by

rupturing the chapter structure that the rest of *The Waves* follows so rigidly[3]. However, the six friends do eventually form another cohesive whole, gathering for the second dinner party on their own initiative without Percival's leadership. In this new grouping, all six characters gain a greater measure of liberty than they possessed under the uniformity of the group's implicitly fascist worship of the imperialist Percival, and they develop the same sense of a unified community without submitting to an external hero. This second meeting is slightly more somber than the first though, as they recall Percival's death and consider their own old age. At that second meeting, Bernard feels that "however high we leap we fall back again into the stream," and although this party still involves much the same utopian collectivity of the first dinner, the sense of elation and omnipotence that Percival provided has dissipated (216). While *The Waves* does allow the six friends political and communal success with an equal and intimate collective free from the threat of authoritarian leadership, there is no replacement for the youthful euphoric adoration they felt for Percival.

Furthermore, *The Waves* does not end with even this optimistic a vision, and the personal freedom that the friends possess at the second dinner party may be merely temporary. In the next chapter Bernard assumes a new form of leadership over the group when he takes over the narration of the book's final segment. The other five voices disappear, except through Bernard's second-hand descriptions, and Bernard gains a distinct authority. In his own more literary way, Bernard inherits Percival's control in *The Waves*. Indeed, Gabrielle McIntire writes that Bernard "chooses to impose his single voice on the inexhaustibly plural experiences of others to contain the diversity they

[3] "Every previous section had all six voices, but in the section immediately after [Percival's death], only three voices are heard, and the other three are heard in the next section. These two sections are roughly half as long as the others in the novel: they are half chapters, broken chapters" (Tratner, 219-220).

denote under the rubric of a single interpretation" (35). Jane Marcus calls Bernard's assumption of the narration an act of "literary hegemony," which indeed it is (66). The potentially imperialist and fascist implications of Bernard's assumed narration are underscored by the fact that he is the most conventionally privileged of the six views in *The Waves*. Unlike Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda, he is male. Unlike Louis, he is British and upper class. Unlike Neville, he is heterosexual, with a wife and son, the conventional god of his own household. Moreover, it is worth noting that Bernard's narrated final chapter is told to an unnamed listener whom Bernard met "on board a ship going to Africa" (238). Hence the narration ties to Bernard's own potentially imperialist voyage. His imperialist desire to "assume command of the British Empire" might thus be weightier than all the empty predictions of Percival's future glory, for with his final chapter Bernard gains a more lasting control. We read the legacy of Bernard's words (mediated, of course, by Woolf) even after he has flung himself at death, while Percival dies forever mute.

Though Percival is not quite speechless: he does utter just one word in *The Waves* – "No" (39)[4]. The negative value of this statement is emblematic of Percival's destructive imperialist and militarist violence. Moreover, the word is uttered in response to a quality of falseness in Bernard's storytelling, as though Percival is already vying for power with Bernard, using his social leadership to struggle against Bernard's verbal ability to draw the others to listen intently. Indeed, Neville uses the statement as yet another excuse to idolize Percival, declaring that "he is always the first to detect insincerity; and is brutal in the extreme." Bernard is repeatedly tentative about his own identity, feeling that his personality and thought do not exist coherently outside of the

[4] As observed by McIntire (39).

social input of others. In consequence, his words and stories develop a persistent incompleteness and ambiguity that mirror his view of himself. On the other hand, the sole word that Percival ever speaks is absolutely assertive and unequivocal, and the text specifically describes it as "brutal," like all of his imperialist and authoritarian violence.

Thus in *The Waves* Virginia Woolf brings out the potential for violence on every level from description to characterization to language itself. The personal friendships are repeatedly, deeply, and effectually political. This view of human interaction is sweeping and radical, and would draw profuse and biting criticism seven years later when Woolf published *Three Guineas*, in which she argued that this variety of small-scale, interpersonal brutality has a direct causal relationship with fascism and war on a societal and international level. In part, Rhoda's exclusion and Percival's leadership are honest treatments of personalities and social positions. However, their existences also involve firm criticisms of society's exclusionist tendencies, as well as its susceptibility to false fascist promises and leader-worship. The situation becomes further complicated when Bernard begins to seize a form of control that is potentially more effective – but also more ambiguous – than Percival's authoritarian leadership. The societal criticisms involved are often subtle, because in *The Waves* Virginia Woolf scrupulously avoids explaining in favor of describing, so that raw events and personalities replace traditional plot and characters. *The Waves* aims to create a more natural, experiential mode of writing, avoiding conventional detail and background in favor of a more genuine, immediate treatment of consciousness and human interaction. Here Woolf creates an entirely new literary structure – neither novel, nor play, nor poem – that comments on the genuine personal beginnings of the turbulent political strife that beset her own pre-World

War II era. As Louis says, "my roots are threaded, like fibres in a flower-pot, round and round about the world" (20). The roots of *The Waves* are political and deeply consequential, winding "round and round the world," precisely because the roots of our world's dilemmas lie in the consequences of the small scale, interpersonal interactions – the kinds that preoccupy Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis.

Chapter Three. From Private Brother to Monstrous Male: *Three Guineas*, Society, and Loyalty in *The Waves*

By the time Virginia Woolf published *Three Guineas* in 1938, the political climate around her had exploded. In addition to Mussolini, Hitler's rule was now secured, and World War II loomed enormous before Europe. The problems of fascism and imperialistic expansion that Woolf addressed in *The Waves* had become dangerously relevant, and her commitment to struggling against them is unmistakable in the uncompromising political commitment of *Three Guineas*. Although Woolf states her anti-authoritarian, anti-nationalist politics most clearly in *Three Guineas*, the same sentiments are present in her writing as early as *Mrs. Dalloway*, and they are absolutely evident in *The Waves*. Critics have placed *Three Guineas* and *The Waves* at opposing extremes of Woolf's body of writing, but this view overlooks both the unusual structure of *Three Guineas* and the many-leveled political critiques present in *The Waves*. Such an outlook marginalizes both books into limited, over-categorized roles that neither one deserves. *Three Guineas* and *The Waves* display repeated and extensive similarities, and reading the two together sheds light on the diverse nature of both works. In particular, viewing *The Waves* through the lens of *Three Guineas* reveals a deeply consequential concern for the nature of the political and the personal at every level of social interaction in that innovative play-poem-novel.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf questions the very nature and value of society. Asked by an anonymous man how to prevent war, she writes at length about social structures, gender, and writing, with precious little direct attention to government and international

history. Her answer, in a nutshell, has to do with smaller scale, interpersonal interactions: we cannot prevent war between nations without first remedying the inequities our own society, because there lie the roots of fascism, militarism, and imperialism.

> Though it is possible, and to the optimistic credible, that in time a new society may ring a carillon of splendid harmony, and your letter heralds it, that day is far distant. Inevitably we ask ourselves, is there not something in the conglomeration of people into societies that releases what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves? Inevitably we look upon society, so kind to you, so harsh to us, as an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will. Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially. (105)

Our question might then become whether patterns within *The Waves* exemplify or contradict what Woolf here describes in *Three Guineas*.

The very notion of what socialization entails is complicated in *The Waves*. We call the six characters friends (often to avoid using the also flawed term "character"), yet they seem to despise, ignore, and resent each other as much as or even more than they demonstrate friendliness and affection. At the same time, however, they remain somehow artificially cemented together throughout the book. There is a structural, poetic element to their relationships, imposed by the author to create six blending views that symmetrically mirror and contrast with each other, rather than to reveal realistically believable friendships. These six personalities repeatedly insist upon their own difference and detachment from the others, yet persistently mirror each other's thoughts with a connection that becomes mystical, telepathic, and realistically impossible. The six speak of hatred and resentment, but remain close throughout long lives, and the tone of

their societal interactions remains stolidly consistent throughout; they fit into the same social patterns as small children and as elderly adults, and their particular roles, leaders, and followers never change.

On one level, the notion of friendship might lead us to posit theirs as a merely personal interaction – their friendship should exemplify the "private brother" and not the "monstrous male." Yet this "monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks," appears repeatedly in the text. Percival is just such a violent imperialist as this phrase describes, fighting for the domination of India and repeatedly portrayed as one who would beat children with sticks and lead his quiescent and obliging sheep to the slaughter. The connection is further emphasized by the fact that Percival was based partly on Woolf's own brother Thoby (McIntire, 41; Froula, 381). In a totally literal sense, Percival thus embodies the "private brother" transformed by society into the "monstrous male." The social microcosm that the six individuals of *The Waves* inhabit works directly to reinforce their meek worship of Percival as a leader. Although individually some express criticism or distrust for Percival, when together with the larger group they become unquestionably worshipping, repeatedly describing him as a magnificent leader and empire-builder.

The "society" formed by the six personalities in *The Waves* might be viewed as a symbolic equivalent of the larger historical society that Woolf saw herself inhabiting in the 1930s. We could also equate it more generally with society as a whole throughout (Western) history. Yet at the same time, the interactions that constitute *The Waves* need also to be remembered as the personal and natural relations and exchanges of close friends and rivals rather than being emblematic of society. Here, *Three Guineas* becomes

relevant for the manner in which it persistently interrogates the notions of society and socialization on multiple levels, from brothers and sisters up to fascist national leadership. As an essay, its claims are far more easily articulated, summarized, and evaluated than the complex and contradictory examples of consciousness that play out in *The Waves*.

Three Guineas has been generally received as revolutionary for its political notions rather than for its form, but it is worth noting that it, too, raises some of the same problems with traditional formal boundaries that pervade *The Waves*. *Three Guineas* might be considered a simple extended essay, and in many ways it is. But it also contains a fleshed out narrator, who exists sufficiently as a recognizable person within the text to become a character, as well as a narrator, rather than the mere "I" of the author. *Three Guineas* purports to be the response to a letter, but presumably Virginia Woolf never actually mailed the nearly 200-page treatise to the original correspondent (if he even existed). Instead, she published it as a book, and *Three Guineas*'s own preoccupation with its form is conspicuous within the text. Woolf responds to two other letters within the frame of the first response, as though creating a microcosm of her own microcosm of narration. This constant consciousness of form is a trait that *Three Guineas* shares with the more flamboyant disruption of the novel form in *The Waves*. Letters can be useful for their natural existence: writing a lengthy, published essay is completely outside of the realm of experience for most people, but everybody writes letters. By presenting *Three Guineas* as purportedly a letter, Woolf resituates it in a more quotidian and accessible form than that of the academic essay. Similarly, by writing *The Waves* almost entirely as the transcribed text of statements that the six friends have "said," Woolf can ostensibly

avoid a certain presumptuousness associated with omniscient third person narration. In examining the nature of writing in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf explicitly acknowledges just such a problem: "If I speak in the first person, with intolerable egotism, I will ask you to excuse me. I do not want to attribute to the world at large the opinions of one solitary, ill-informed, and misguided individual" (22).

Yet at the same time, both *Three Guineas* and *The Waves* are acutely conscious of their own failure actually to exist as letters or speech. The personalities of *The Waves* communicate through the unified and poetic voice of an external (if elusive) narrator, rather than in the colloquial language they would presumably assume if speaking. Though they might at first seem to be talking to each other, their soliloquies generally function more like streams of thought that lie below and beyond consciousness, and there are only three episodes in the book that might operate like distinct conversations (even these examples are highly questionable as spoken interchanges)[5]. *Three Guineas* does not bother to assume the outer shape of a letter, such as any salutation, address, or valediction. Instead it exhibits the structures of an essay – 43 out of its 188 pages are endnotes, and numbered chapters divide it into logical segments. Neither book actually tries to inhabit the colloquial form it claims to exhibit.

Moreover, both *The Waves* and *Three Guineas* toy with more artistic, "higher" forms as well. *The Waves* is Woolf's most poetic and artistically experimental novel, and it succeeds to the extent that its structure might be better denoted by the term Woolf

[5] These would be the two more coherent dinner exchanges between Rhoda and Louis (140-141, 226-227) and the one-sided conversation where Bernard spends nearly the entire final chapter purportedly explaining his life to a silent witness (238-294). However, there is minimal to no acknowledgment of the other conversant in all three cases, making their status as verbal interchange extremely suspect. Other moments of the book when soliloquies echo or even respond to individual pieces of information from previous soliloquies are common, but these responses never develop the logical flow and consistency involved in real dialogue.

herself used, "play-poem," rather than by "novel." Woolf described it as "abstract" and "poetic," and it is indeed both. *Three Guineas*, on the other hand, narrates its own creation with such a persistent "I" that it comes to resemble a diary or novel, much as its predecessor *A Room of One's Own* does. Such an artistic preoccupation with the self-referential status of narration, storytelling, and argument situates both *The Waves* and *Three Guineas* firmly within Woolf's modernist experimentations, though readers have traditionally placed them at opposite ends of her innovative spectrum. Indeed, *Three Guineas* is generally considered a political tract rather than a literary work, thus eclipsing all of its formal experimentation behind its political arguments, associative and elliptical though those arguments might be. By contrast, Jane Marcus argues that *The Waves*'s innovativeness makes it an early postmodern novel, anticipating future experimentations in form and point of view. Yet these two works are firmly unified in their own self-conscious defiance of their respective forms. Such structural connections underscore the import of their potential unity in subject matter.

Three Guineas is steadfastly concerned with questions of personal and general human interaction, and when Woolf is asked to consider the prevention of war she gravitates immediately toward the broader values of society and culture. Woolf was thoroughly aware of governmental decisions that might lead to aggression and war, and she willingly criticized Mussolini's politics by name in *A Room of One's Own*. However, in *Three Guineas* (as in *The Waves*) she opts instead to address larger matters of human violence from a perspective that draws economics, art, writing, and society into the equation together. And as Woolf begins to excoriate the societal pressures that encourage violence in men and submission in women, a distinction immediately develops: "culture"

is good, and "society" bad. In *Three Guineas*, culture comes to signify all the positive fruits of Western learning and accomplishment, including art, music, and, above all, writing. Society, on the other hand, is precisely that conspiratorial force which transforms the "private brother" into the "monstrous male." Thus Woolf might be able to distinguish entirely between the cultured poetry and the violent socializing of *The Waves*. When Neville fascinates himself with Shakespeare it is an innocent pursuit, while his worship of Percival is tied to violence, for he admits that Percival "should have a birch and beat little boys" (36).

Yet distinctions between patriarchal society and culture are not so clear in *The Waves* as Woolf makes them in *Three Guineas*. For instance, whereas *Three Guineas* is enormously concerned by society's general and dominant tendency to exclude women from political and artistic efforts, the cultural constructs in *The Waves* exclude women in precisely the same way. Bernard, Louis, and Neville are all enthralled by poetry and writing, and all three of them dream of creating such poetry themselves. Even Percival tries to compose poetry, though Neville admits that Percival "cannot read" (48). In contrast, Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda are cut off from such dreams entirely. Their schooling differs to the extent that they may lack even the opportunity to read the authors that the men revere. The educational system in *The Waves* is an exclusionist power structure that propagates sexist and classist inequalities. (Louis, too, must leave school before Neville and Bernard, entering business rather than continuing to study poetry, despite the fact that he was the most natural scholar of the three boys.) Moreover, the authors that Bernard, Louis, and Neville admire belong exclusively to the Western canon: Byron, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Lucretius, Pope, Dryden, Shelley, Catullus, Virgil, Plato, Meredith, Horace,

Tennyson, Keats, Arnold, and Tolstoi. These writers are men, without exception. Given that Woolf was writing *The Waves* simultaneously to *A Room of One's Own*, her masterpiece on encouraging women writers and readers, Woolf was undoubtedly aware of the male-chauvinist implications of such a male canon within *The Waves*. The fact that Woolf chose such an exclusive reading list for Bernard, Louis, and Neville nonetheless leaves education, reading, and "culture," implicated in precisely the kind of sexism that Woolf associates with aggression and war in *Three Guineas*. In *Three Guineas* Woolf seems almost blindly to separate society and culture, criticizing the former while defending the latter, all for the larger purpose of explaining the connected motivations of misogyny, aggression, and war. *The Waves*, however, encompasses a far broader and subtler understanding of the shaded differentiations involved.

The Western canon of art and literature is a tradition that Woolf admires and works to preserve from war's ravages; however, it is also sexually exclusive, as Woolf knew, and *Three Guineas* explains clearly how this sort of exclusion swiftly slips into the kind of aggressive power grabbing that generates violence and war. As Jacques Derrida writes, "at the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden.... The concept of centered structure... is contradictorily coherent" (196). Indeed, by creating so sharp a distinction in *Three Guineas* Woolf makes (high) culture the privileged center, glossing over the differential connections and oppositions of society and culture and creating a contradictory coherence that hampers her own ability to accurately consider the related concepts. However, Derrida continues, "as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire" (196), and this division does allow Woolf to reconstruct literature as

a positive, egalitarian force, whereas the more Derridean outlook of *The Waves* results in the representation of the sexist assumption of an entirely male literary canon. *Three Guineas* encourages women writers to rise above their world's sexual limitations; *The Waves* assumes and portrays the female powerlessness that society imposes.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf prescribes two famously specific requirements for women writers: "It is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry" (105). The reader never gets quite enough individual background to know whether Susan, Jinny, or Rhoda have access to such amenities. It is clear, however, that Bernard, Louis, and Neville likely do acquire them. Woolf knows that the economic and personal privileges which she addresses in both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* are more often reserved for men. Such privilege is clearly visible in *The Waves*, where Woolf unfolds "the life of anybody," with all its unjust implications. Of course, all six characters remain relatively advantaged and uniform in class and outlook. However, their differences in privilege play out actively in their respective voices within the text. Bernard, the upper-class, heterosexual male, has both the first and last word. Of course, this excludes the book's narrator and true author, but such an exception only further emphasizes the power and privilege differential that is inherent in writing. Woolf understands the vital consequence of writing and literature in terms of power and society, and this is part of why she emphasizes writing so directly when she addresses the factors of war in *Three Guineas*. In *The Waves*, all of these problems of societal power are visible in their connection to voice, view, and language. Individuals like Rhoda, relatively uneducated and uncomfortable with language as a medium, are denied the kind of descriptive privilege that Bernard holds within the text.

Bernard's soliloquies are longer, more narrative, and more numerous than Rhoda's, and so the reader understands *The Waves* first and last through Bernard's powerfully influential gaze, while the written medium subjugates Rhoda's view and voice.

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf considers further how women might write and enter the professions in general, broadening her conclusions from *A Room of One's Own*. Here, Woolf explains:

> If you refuse to be separated from the four great teachers of the daughters of educated men—poverty, chastity, derision and freedom from unreal loyalties—but combine them with some wealth, some knowledge, and some service to real loyalties then you can enter the professions and escape the risks that make them undesirable. (79-80)

Woolf does go on to further define these four "great teachers," but their nature and implications remain complicated. Her meaning of "poverty," for instance, is unusual: "By poverty is meant enough money to live upon. That is, you must earn enough to be independent of any other human being and to buy that modicum of health, leisure, knowledge and so on that is needed for the full development of body and mind. But no more. Not a penny more" (80). More conventionally, poverty generally denotes precisely insufficient money to live upon, and certainly not so much material wealth as may provide the "health, leisure, knowledge" necessary for "the full development of body and mind." But Woolf turns the concept on its head. Her concern here is not poverty or class per se, but the societal impact of drawing women into the professions. Poverty, money, and Woolf's own three guineas, as well as *Three Guineas* itself, are tools rather than ends in themselves.

Woolf's treatment of what she calls "unreal loyalties" is even more complicated.

> By freedom from unreal loyalties is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring from them. Directly the seducers come with their seductions to bribe you into captivity, tear up the parchments; refuse to fill up the forms. (*Three Guineas*, 80)

Such a notion of loyalties is so far reaching that it is difficult to imagine any true disconnection from them, and it is not clear whether Woolf manages this herself. Here she notes that women must rid themselves of "sex pride," among many other prides, and all "those unreal loyalties that spring from them." Yet from the very outset of *Three Guineas*, Woolf writes consciously, specifically, and proudly as a woman. The letter that Woolf replies to presumably requested her response generally regarding war, rather than her opinions particularly as a woman. Yet Woolf immediately gravitates toward the issue specifically as a woman, calling the letter "perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented?" (3). Such a remark reveals a certain pride: we can envision Virginia Woolf swelling with the knowledge that women had progressed so far in society as to merit such requests, and we might even imagine Woolf's satisfaction at having personally earned such respect as to receive the letter herself. Woolf might reveal her own weakness for just those "unreal loyalties" that she so ardently desires women to avoid.

The matter of what constitutes a "real" loyalty plays out complicatedly in *The Waves*. Woolf may expose her own unreal loyalties here as well. In *Three Guineas*, she refers to "some love of England dropped into a child's ears by the cawing of rooks in an elm tree, by the splash of waves on a beach," thus implying that the very scenes of nature that center *The Waves* are nationalistic in themselves. By focusing *The Waves* around

beach scenes and ocean waves, Woolf highlights England's aesthetically beautiful seashores, its unique maritime power, and all the attached imperialist advantages. Moreover, the six personalities in *The Waves* might reveal their own vulnerability toward unreal loyalties. Questions of attachment, connected to such social loyalties, repeatedly arch out above the waters of *The Waves*: Do the birds of the interludes belong "now together, as if conscious of companionship," or "now alone as if to the pale sky" (73)? Are the six personalities more natural as individuals or friends, as small children together or girls and boys separated at school, as couples (Louis and Rhoda) broken off from the rest, as adults telepathically cemented together at dinner parties to create one "swelling and splendid moment" (146), or as personal, disconnected people living separate lives? Is their worship of Percival a real and natural loyalty? Is Neville's sexual love for him equivalent to Louis's envious desire? When Bernard imagines with pride that Percival will solve "the Oriental problem" (136), does it express the same nationalist pride as Neville's concern for "the fate of Europe" (228), or does it express a more personal, perhaps a more real attachment?

All of these questions express conflicts of community and personal loyalties that pervade *The Waves*. Yet it remains thoroughly unclear where the more "real" loyalties among them might lie. *Three Guineas* paints the situation as if it were possible to discern a righteous separation between true loyalties and nationalist, sexist, unjust and prideful thoughts. Yet the distinctions are, as ever, subtle in *The Waves*. Louis sums up the situation when he debates his own loyalties to Percival:

> Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep, for he will certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle. My heart turns rough; it abrades my side like a file with two edges; one, that I adore his magnificence; the other that I

> despise his slovenly accents—I who am so much his superior—and I am jealous. (37)

On the one hand, Louis correctly recognizes the violence of Percival's leadership, and Percival will indeed die in militaristic efforts (though without the glory Louis predicts). Yet Louis nonetheless remains another faithful servant. He recognizes the contradictions of his feelings, but maintains both extremes simultaneously. The irony becomes even more pronounced when we consider Louis's criticism of Percival's "slovenly accents," for Louis's Australian accent is his own worst enemy. Thus, even the line between Louis and Percival somehow begins to break down. Headed to "die in battle," leading "trooping" servants "to die like sheep," Percival is clearly militaristic here, and when Woolf writes *Three Guineas* she makes her hatred for all that is militaristic unquestionably clear. Yet all six friends love Percival personally, as a friend. He is not some distant Mussolini figure that stands before crowds, and so the friends' loyalty here seems naturally distinct from that fascist variety of larger, unreal loyalty. Thus the lines repeatedly and consistently break down.

The problem lies in the same analogy that Woolf uses to tie together the entire book. The characters, views, personalities, individuals, and friends of *The Waves* stand in for waves traveling the English seashore, just as these waves substitute for them in return. What, then, is the more natural state of an ocean wave? Do those self-asserting waves more naturally belong lost in the surrounding waters? The very last line of *The Waves* addresses such form: "*The waves broke on the shore*. THE END." In a sense, when waves break upon a shore, they do end. As waves break, they sink below their previous height, but they also arch out to their furthest point beyond the ocean surface. This break is their greatest individual self-assertion, when they are most distinguishable from the waters

around them. Yet it is also the moment of their death, when they retreat into those waters once more. In such a moment, it becomes meaningless to consider whether the break is more "real" than the moment before or after. Waves are defined by how they arch above the surface independently. But they are also always, irrevocably, a part of the medium that surrounds them. Their connection – loyalty – to the sea around them is always real.

Three Guineas offers an idealized version of this form of osmotic connection in the figure of what Woolf calls an "Outsiders' Society." In an effort to preserve the way that women are already cut off from society and unreal loyalties, Woolf explains that this society would go to such extremes as to "have no office, no committee, no secretary; it would call no meetings; it would hold no conferences" (106). Yet Woolf still somehow endows it with sufficient unity to maintain specific and demanding duties such as "not to incite their brothers to fight, or to dissuade them, but to maintain an attitude of complete indifference" (107). One wonders how Woolf could even hypothetically create a society entirely without any organized contact that could retain the ability to invoke such expansive rules. Such a vision of collective consciousness recalls the telepathic unity of the individuals in *The Waves*.

Indeed, multiple critics have commented on the directly feminist implications of the mental union apparent in the six voices of *The Waves*. Christine Froula has pointed out that the cognitive collectivity shared by *The Waves*' six men and women, regardless of gender, echoes the androgyny that Woolf advocates in her essays and elsewhere: "The feminist politics that produces *The Waves* is ultimately not an identity politics, marked by self/other oppositions and attendant scapegoat dynamics, but seeks women's freedom from identity." Thus "*The Waves* pursues a feminist politics' furthest goal: its own

demolition" (177). Arguing along similar lines, Pamela Transue writes that "the collective self is an undivided self, and... Woolf clearly suggests that we view gender as a means and not an end. For that reason, it is surely accurate to say that feminism and humanism are, for Woolf, indistinguishable" (143). These arguments are vividly realized in the moment from *Three Guineas* when Woolf burns the word "feminist" out of the dictionary, marking it as "obsolete" and incorrect, for it was always equivalent to "Justice and Equality and Liberty" anyhow: "The word 'feminist' is destroyed; the air is cleared; and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause" (101, 102). Thus Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*, and implies in *The Waves*, that the more genuine connections are broadly human rather than specifically gendered.

Yet the "Outsiders' Society" is nonetheless one comprised solely of women, and the loyalty that it would involve for its members as outsiders is so extensive that it would apparently overcome nearly every other form of loyalty that people are accustomed to considering. Faced with questions of patriotism and war, a member of the society ought to conclude that "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (109). Despite Woolf's rejection of identity politics elsewhere (as when she lists "sex pride" as an unreal loyalty) the "real loyalty" here is as woman (80). The apparent contradiction might be resolved by Woolf's argument that feminist pursuits are only another means to the same greater goals of "Justice and Equality and Liberty," so that these loyalties as a female outsider exemplify not sex pride but part of a larger humanist pursuit (102). However, the differentiations involved here are complicated, and real and unreal loyalties remain difficult to untangle.

Woolf does acknowledge some of the vagueness involved in her notion of real and unreal loyalties in *Three Guineas*, but the intervention hardly helps to clarify the situation. "If you still object that these definitions are both too arbitrary and too general, and ask... which are the real loyalties which we must serve and which the unreal which we must despise, I can only refer you—time presses—to two authorities" (81). The two authorities that Woolf proceeds to provide, the private and public "psychometer," are arguably even more vague in nature than her original notion of real and unreal loyalties. To simplify a little, her "private psychometer" may be equated with common sense and personal opinion, while the "public psychometer" encompasses conclusions to be drawn from art, music, and, particularly, literature (81). This distinction creates, however, more questions than it answers. In fact, it seems to assume that the nature of real and unreal loyalties should already be apparent to the thoughtful and well-read observer.

Nevertheless, the qualification provides another lens for considering the complexity of *The Waves*, in terms of how that earlier text again evokes these ideas even as it merges them, rendering their distinction unclear. That is, *The Waves* can be seen as involving both the public and private psychometers simultaneously. We use the "public psychometer" by definition, for we are reading, and hence consulting the implications of the text as part of the collective body of published literature. However, *The Waves* is no ordinary novel, but rather a book that, in drawing attention to its difference from that collective body, suggests an exclusion from it. Indeed, it is such a strangely descriptive book, providing views, moments, and personalities with precious little in terms of plot, that it becomes more a string of simple exposed presences than a narrative. Strikingly, this resembles the practice that Woolf connects to her "private psychometer": "If you

want to find out how much wealth is desirable expose it in a rich man's presence; how much learning is desirable expose it in a learned man's presence. So with patriotism, religion, and the rest. The conversation need not be interrupted while you consult it; nor its amenity disturbed" (81). This "private psychometer" is impartial human observation at its essence, with the sense of a totally pure and uninteresed gaze exemplified by the disinterested mock scientific gaze of her invented "psychometer." Woolf argues that with honest and unattached contemplation, human beings can reach conclusions that rise beyond individual predispositions and prejudices. Argument should ideally be unnecessary. Indeed, *The Waves* resembles observation stripped down to its kernel, and reading amounts to a poetic glimpse of the world directly through its various characters' eyes, experiencing their continuous streams of thought and existence without interruption.

Woolf's psychometers, like her notion of real and unreal loyalties, are somewhat deliberately vague. For if the goal is to liberate readers to develop their own loyalties and to utilize their own private psychometers, then prescriptive instructions would defy Woolf's purpose. Even the very notion of the public psychometer implies a collective human response that on the one hand liberates individuals to read and think as they choose, and on the other hand projects a certain uniformity in their responses. This uniformity likewise presumes the stable influence of the original writers, but also entails a kind of collectivism, as though implying that ordinary people possess the kind of mental connection that Woolf's characters reveal in *The Waves*.

Woolf provides a specific example of the public psychometer, revealing the correct conclusion that she expects her readers to reach. She explains the concept via *Antigone*:

> Consider the character of Creon. There you have a most profound analysis by a poet, who is a psychologist in action, of the effect of power and wealth upon the soul. Consider Creon's claim to absolute rule over his subjects. That is a far more instructive analysis of tyranny than any our politicians can offer us. You want to know which are the unreal loyalties which we must despise, which the real loyalties which we must honour? Consider Antigone's distinction between the laws and the Law. That is a far more profound statement of the duties of the individual to society than any our sociologists can offer us. Lame as the English rendering is, Antigone's five words are worth all the sermons of all the archbishops. But to enlarge would be impertinent. Private judgment is still free in private; and that freedom is the essence of freedom. (81-2)

Large-scale politics are best understood individually. We can comprehend fascism better via Sophocles's psychological understanding of Creon than through any direct discussion of Mussolini. In part, this is due to Sophocles' skills of expression: Creon's description of the authoritarian notion of political obedience might be more eloquent and honest than any that Mussolini or Hitler ever provided:

> The man the state has put in place must have
> obedient hearing to his least command
> when it is right, and even when it's not.
> He who accepts this teaching I can trust,
> ruler, or ruled, to function in his place,
> to stand his ground even in the storm of spears,
> a mate to trust in battle at one's side.
> There is no greater wrong than disobedience.
> This ruins cities, this tears down our homes,
> this breaks down the battle-front in panic-rout. (Wyckoff translation, 765-773)

Certainly, Woolf is right to call attention to the eerie similarity between Nazism and Creon's tyrannical philosophy, with such extended notions of obedience and a person's

proper, militaristic place. The play is clearly relevant to the pre-World War II era. As Woolf points out that tyranny can be best understood through Sophocles's portrayal of Creon (with whom she notes that we sympathize, nonetheless), she might similarly hope that the imperialist and fascist attitudes expressed on a personal, understandable level in *The Waves* would be more instructive than any overt argument, so that the reader gains a sense both of their seductive power and their illegitimacy. Indeed, the subtle, uninterrupted soliloquies of *The Waves* might convey such notions better than the more straightforward character development of a traditional novel.

But *Antigone* is relevant here as far more than just an example of Sophocles's fine writing. *Antigone* epitomizes links between personal and political interactions. As Creon himself proclaims,

> If I allow disorder in my house
> I'd surely have to license it abroad.
> A man who deals in fairness with his own,
> he can make manifest justice in the state. (Wyckoff translation, 659-662)

This is exactly what Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*: the roots of injustice and fascism must be traced back to the home and defeated there if there is to be any hope of eliminating them on a larger scale. Indeed, the political and the personal are so consistently rendered equivalent in *Antigone* that it becomes meaningless to distinguish between them. Antigone buries Polyneices because he was her brother and she loved him, but she is aware from the outset that Creon will consider it a treasonous act of rebellion nonetheless, and so it becomes an acknowledged political act for her as well. Haemon is simultaneously motivated by love for his fiancé, his father, and the political good of the state. Since they all lead him to the same conclusion, it would be meaningless to try to rank these loyalties. When Creon refuses to see the wisdom of the

path that Haemon knows is in Creon's best interests as well as the state's, their political argument becomes a personal loss. When Woolf refers to Antigone's "five words" (above), she again emphasizes the political as transformed into the personal. In the prose translation that Woolf used, these five Greek words become, "Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving" (*Three Guineas*, 170; Jebb translation, 129). Here Creon has described all of Polyneices's political crimes, and Antigone does not dispute these facts. However, her approach is that of the loving sister, not the angry politician, because she refuses to separate the personal from the political. If these words are "worth all the sermons of all the archbishops" (*Three Guineas*, 80), perhaps it is because they strive toward a genuine, personal sentiment (connection) with fellow human beings, detached from violence and regardless of ideology or past actions.

As Woolf notes, Antigone distinguishes between the prescribed laws of the state and the unwritten laws of the heavens. Antigone is adamant that her prior responsibility belongs to the latter, and Woolf (in her atheistic fashion) concurs, considering these unwritten laws the real loyalties, while the demands of Creon are unreal. But Antigone's ranking of her own loyalties is primarily one of firm faith and instinct: she knows that Creon will kill her now, but she is equally sure that the afterlife will redeem her, and she knows that her buried brother will thank her. Woolf was no fan of organized religion in general (as *Three Guineas* makes clear), but she trusts Antigone's instincts as to where her own loyalties lie. Creon's failure is that he acts on pride rather than his own instinctive love and trust for the advice of his son Haemon and the dependable prophet Tiresias: Creon feels the pull of his own real loyalties, but he ignores them nonetheless. Thus, to follow Woolf's instructions and derive the meaning of "real loyalties" from

Antigone, we must conclude that the term is, in some sense, fundamentally indefinable. Everybody has their own real loyalties, and where they belong is a matter of personal instinct and love. ("Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving.") Woolf uses the notion of real and unreal loyalties in a deeply political manner in *Three Guineas*, but their origin resides the personal realm, as do all politics in *Antigone*, *Three Guineas*, and *The Waves* alike.

In her use of the public psychometer within *Three Guineas*, Woolf draws specific political conclusions from *Antigone*, directly connecting the classical play to her own pre-World War II era. She ties it to particular names and dates of her own place and time, and in addition to relating Creon to Hitler and Mussolini, she compares Antigone to a Mrs. Pankhurst and a Frau Pommer. As though highlighting the many-layered details of the play's specifically political relevence, Woolf deliberately references these women by name, providing particulars like the fact that Mrs. Panklehurst "broke a window and was imprisoned in Holloway," while Frau Pommer was "the wife of a Prussian mines official at Essen" (169). The conclusion seems to be not only that literature is useful for drawing political instruction, but that it definitively ought to be used in such a manner. This is, after all, the only concrete explanation that Woolf provides as a direct example of the nature of real and unreal loyalties, and she instructs readers to follow her example with their own personal psychometers, which "you carry on your wrist," as though the practice were as straightforward, objective, and innocent as reading the time (81).

However, Woolf's view of the relation between politics and literature remains complicated. After all this explanation of the public psychometer and its use to

understand political loyalties via literature, Woolf still turns around in a footnote and cautions against taking this method too far:

> Though it is easy to squeeze these characters into up-to-date dress, it is impossible to keep them there. They suggest too much; when the curtain falls we sympathize, it may be noted, even with Creon himself. This result, to the propagandist undesirable, would seem to be due to the fact that Sophocles... uses freely all the faculties that can be possessed by a writer; and suggests, therefore, that if we use art to propagate political opinions, we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered; and there will be no more horses. (170)

Antigone is easy to relate to fascism and twentieth-century politics, because it is a text that engages extensively with the use and abuse of governmental power. It can shed relevant light on Hitler, Mussolini, Mrs. Panklehurst, and Frau Pommer, and such readings are valid. However, it is a classic play that involves innumerable other matters as well, and considering it for its political implications must not be confused with using it as a simple tool – a work donkey – to "propagate" political conclusions. As Woolf points out, *Antigone* is sufficiently political and relevant that it "could undoubtedly be made, if necessary, into anti-fascist propaganda," but her message is that we must not reduce it as such (169). Politics and literature are related; they can be used together, and either one can aid the other. However, they remain different nonetheless, and though they may be intermixed – as Woolf does on varying levels in both *Three Guineas* and *The Waves* – they should not be conflated.

This leaves readers of *The Waves* in a complicated position indeed. Woolf's first reading of *Antigone* implies that the poetry, timelessness, and interpersonal focus of *The Waves* only make it more politically relevant. Yet her subsequent disclaimer cautions against carrying that reading too far. Thus we must return once more to the perplexing

text of *The Waves* with our own psychometers in tow to determine for ourselves, with our own instincts, the nature of the loyalties and communities of that innovative book. It is clear that *The Waves* concerns itself with subject matter that is extensively political, including the prominent positions in reserves for gender, imperialism, and human community, among many others. However, how the experimental form evades any quick or simple conclusion regarding the valuation of the political domains it evokes. Hence the tendency of subsequent criticism to remove the novel from political domains entirely, using its concern with form to label its innovations aesthetic rather than political. It is only more recently that scholars such as Michael Tratner and Cristine Froula have argued strongly and convincingly that the experimental style of *The Waves* actually furthers its political implications. Tratner argues that *The Waves* constructs conventional biographical, novelistic, and narrative styles to be coercive in the same way that imperialism is coercive, so that in *The Waves*, "the conventional domestic life presented in biographies is preparation for imperial leadership" (224). Thus *The Waves* works to avoid a literary structure that is itself domineering, aiming instead for a new, liberal, egalitarian reconstruction of writing and human interaction.

Many critics have argued that *The Waves*'s avoidance of any particular physical and temporal grounding necessarily detaches it from the political world (e.g. Zwerdling, 10). It is true that the book's generality makes specific political conclusions difficult. Its implications are naturally more amorphous than the pacifist sentiment of *Mrs. Dalloway* that reacts specifically to World War I, or the anti-aggression of *Between the Acts* that develops directly from contemporary Nazi expansionism. But it could be argued that greater generality is precisely what ensures an enduring political life: *Antigone* has

retained its political relevance over millennia. Thus the generality inherent in the aesthetic style of *The Waves* can make it feel distant, but it can also endow it with a broader political relevance. *The Waves*'s political implications may be more amorphous, but they are also more expansive.

It is easy to imagine that artistic experiments can gain political extension from their very willingness to innovate. Woolf's desire to deconstruct so many literary expectations is radical in itself, and the play-poem form of *The Waves* remains sufficiently unusual today to confuse its readers considerably. Modernism itself and all of its technical innovations were in many ways a reaction against the social conservativeness of Victorian culture and writing. Stream-of-consciousness writing can be tied to Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking and liberating reevaluation of the nature of consciousness in favor of more disordered and less logical models. With the stream-of-subconsciousness style invented in *The Waves*, Woolf stretches these radical literary movements ever further, and the same connected political liberalism follows further as well.

But ultimately, any discussion of *The Waves* returns to the six expansive, living voices, and for them, politics is a question of human connection – community, friendship, personal relations, mental and emotional understanding, and transcendent collectivity. Within the structure of the book, this thematic connection expands even further, to encompass the many-layered poetic ties that Woolf constructs between the waves, the birds, the six individuals, their formed collective, their leader Percival, their English nation, their European travels, their colonial imaginings, and the great wide social and physical world beyond. With these ties between inanimate, animal, human, and societal

existences Woolf implies a certain transcendental, mystical unity of life and the earth at large. She also implies an irrevocable tie between the personal and the political. Woolf expresses the colossal political scope and impact of this notion of connection in her conclusion to *Three Guineas*:

> Another picture has imposed itself on the foreground. It is the figure of a man; some say, others deny, that he is Man himself, the quintessence of virility, the perfect type of which all others are imperfect adumbrations. He is a man certainly. His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare.... His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies—men, women, and children. But we have not laid that picture before you in order to excite once more the sterile emotion of hate. On the contrary it is in order to release other emotions such as the human figure, even thus crudely in a coloured photograph, arouses in us who are human beings. For it suggests a connection and for us a very important connection. It suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other. But the human figure even in a photograph suggests other and more complex emotions. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life. How essential it is that we should realize that unity the dead bodies, the ruined houses prove. For such will be our ruin if you in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world. Both houses will be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected. (142-3)

Woolf argues that all of us can identify with the fascist figure. Whether privately or publicly, all of us could be Hitler or Mussolini.

The six friends love Percival truly and personally, because he provides them with unified community, and they can admire him unceasingly despite all his violence. This is the same swell of unifying pride that lifted Hitler and Mussolini to power, but it is also

the honest love that was Antigone's greatest strength: the answers are never easy, and they may even be paradoxical. Percival embodies the fascist figure described above – even the eyes match ("His eyes are glazed, his eyes glare"; "His blue, and oddly inexpressive eyes, are fixed with pagan indifference") (*Three Guineas*, 142; *The Waves*, 36). He is also a friend, and his early death is tragic. The fact that the reader can simultaneously appreciate Percival's horrific potential and sympathize with the others' admiration for him demonstrates the skill of the writer as well as the complexity of the political situation. As Woolf praises Sophocles for leading the audience to sympathize even with Creon, so we can in turn praise Woolf for communicating both aspects of Percival.

The connected personal-political nature of the situation further expands the breadth and value of what Woolf has accomplished. Woolf argues that the connections of private and public, personal and political, are not merely parallel similarities; rather, they are causal relationships – sexism, classism, and racism in the home directly lead to fascism in the state. Thus understanding the nature of fascism and imperialism on a personal level is a prerequisite to battling such ideologies on a political level. And indeed, fighting them on either terrain are equivalent acts. We must never forget or sacrifice either plane of existence, or "both houses will be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected" (143).

As Woolf so eloquently states, "it is one world, one life" (143). Moreover, "one world, one life" is exactly what she demonstrates with the six voices of *The Waves*. Woolf gives us a stroll through their lives, and we gain a journey round the world. Their identity is personal, their community is political, and vice-versa. Both levels have

relevant and consequential implications for the egalitarian, collectivist manner in which Woolf implies that we should view, treat, interact with, and govern each other as human beings. Woolf envisions such a utopian society, but she is also firmly grounded in the realities of national and societal interaction:

> We are reminded of other connections that lie far deeper than the facts on the surface. Even here, even now your letter tempts us to shut our ears to these little facts, these trivial details, to listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets, answering each other, assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only; to discuss with you the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity. But that would be to dream—to dream the recurring dream that has haunted the human mind since the beginning of time; the dream of peace, the dream of freedom. But, with the sound of the guns in your ears you have not asked us to dream. You have not asked us what peace is; you have asked us how to prevent war. Let us then leave it to the poets to tell us what the dream is; and fix our eyes upon the photograph again: the fact. (*Three Guineas*, 143)

In many ways, *The Waves* appears to be that dream: a utopian vision of a beautifully collective, yet impossible, existence. But then, *The Waves* has as much to say about lonely exclusion as successful collectivity, for apart from the dinner parties, the six voices also repeatedly fail to procure the community that they seek, and some are violently victimized by others. Moreover, much of *The Waves* embodies a portrait of Percival painted by the other six – precisely the paradoxically admirable photo of a fascist that Woolf indicates above: "the fact." Indeed, throughout the text of *The Waves*, Woolf repeatedly gravitates toward the "facts" of imperialist domination, fascist and authoritarian leadership, class prejudice, sexist exclusiveness, and violent human interaction, all of which she portrays in great detail.

These trends demonstrate that *The Waves* is no exclusive, poetic retreat from the physical world. *The Waves* does entail pieces of the "dream," but it also consistently considers the "fact." *The Waves* constantly engages with the political controversies that consumed Europe in the 1920's and 30's. Its portrayal of imperialism as arrogant and fundamentally unstable is accurate and perceptive. Its focus on the simultaneously horrific and alluring nature of fascism is ominously prophetic of the terrors of Nazism that would come to pass in the years shortly thereafter. Woolf had her finger on the political pulse of human consciousness. *The Waves* is an innovative lyrical investigation of human thought, and it is simultaneously an unwaveringly relevant political text. For Woolf, the two elements always went hand in hand.

Works Cited and Consulted:

Abravanel, Genevieve. "Woolf in Blackface: Identification across *The Waves*." *Virginia Woolf Out of Bounds*. Ed. Jessica Berman and Jane Goldman. New York: Pace Univeristy Press, 2001.

Booker, M. Keith. "Tradition, Authority, and Subjectivity: Narrative Constitution of the Self in The Waves." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*. 3 (1991): 33-55.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Trans. Alan Bass. *Modern Literary Theory*. Ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Fleishman, Avrom. *Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

Froula, Christine. *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Gillespie, Diane Filby. *The Sisters' Arts*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988.

Graham, J. W. "Point of View in *The Waves*: Some Services of the Style." *Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Thomas S. W. Lewis. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

Guiguet, Jean. *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*. Trans. Jean Stewart. New York: Harcourt, 1965.

Marcus, Jane. *Hearts of Darkness*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Moore, Madeline. *The Short Season Between Two Silences*. Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984.

McIntire, Gabrielle. "Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads *The Waves*." *Narrative*. 13 (2005): 29-45.

Naremore, James. *The World Without a Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.

Olson, Liesl M. "Virginia Woolf's 'Cotton Wool of Daily Life.' " *Journal of Modern Literature*. 26 (2003): 42-65. *Literature Online*. 6 May, 2006. <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion-us&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:mla:R03452171:0>.

The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 2005. 5 May, 2006. <http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl>.

Pearce, Richard. *The Politics of Narration*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Phillips, Kathy J. *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994.

Putzel, Steven. "Virginia Woolf and British 'Orientalism.'" *Virginia Woolf Out of Bounds*. Ed. Jessica Berman and Jane Goldman. New York: Pace Univeristy Press, 2001.

Ronchetti, Ann. *The Artist, Society, and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Trans. Richard Claverhouse Jebb. *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*. Ed. Moses Hadas. New York: Bantam, 1967

—. *Antigone*. Trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff. *Sophocles I*. Ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

Stewart, Garrett. "Catching the Stylistic D/rift: Sound Defects in Woolf's *The Waves*." *ELH*. 54 (1987): 421-461. *JSTOR*. 25 Feb. 2006. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0013-8304%28198722%2954%3A2%3C421%3ACTSDSD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S>.

Transue, Pamela J. *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Tratner, Michael. *Modernism and Mass Politics*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1970.

—. *The Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt, 1948.

—. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell with Andrew McNeillie. 5 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1977-1984.

—. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. 6 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1977-1982.

—. *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. London: Sussex University Press, 1976.

—. "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005. 21-32.

—. *Mrs. Dalloway*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.

—. *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1989.

—. *Three Guineas*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1966.

—. *The Waves*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1959.

Young, John. "Woolf's Mrs Dalloway." *Explicator*. 58 (2000): 99-101. *Literature Online*. 6 May, 2006. <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion-us&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:abell:R00796925:0>.

Zwerdling, Alex. *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.