

The Structure is Visible:  
Rhoda's "Moment of Being" in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

Haruna HIROHATA

**Abstract**

ヴァージニア・ウルフ『波』の第5セクションでは、作中で独白をする六人の登場人物のうち、ネヴィル、バーナード、ローダの三人のみが登場する。バーナードとネヴィルは幼少期からそれぞれ物語の語り手と詩人としての自覚を持っているが、残りの一人であるローダに関してはそのような記述はない。英雄的な存在であるパーシヴァルの死の知らせがもたらされる、この作品のクライマックスといえるセクションに、ローダが登場している理由を考える。ウルフ自身の言葉によれば、書くために必要なのは衝撃を受け止める能力であるという。ローダは第5セクションにおいて、パーシヴァルの訃報と劇場で耳にした歌声により世界の真実について啓示を受け、そこに見えた図形を言葉で表すことで衝撃を受け止める能力を持っていることを証明する。しかしローダ自身はこの啓示の体験について十分理解できていなかったため、パーシヴァルの死の意味や歌声の重要性を最終セクションになって理解するバーナードよりもずっと早く真実を見抜くことができていたにもかかわらず、彼女はこの能力を一時的にしか手にすることができず、衝撃に耐えきれずに最終的に自殺することになるのである。

**Key Words:** Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, shock-receiving capacity, writing

**1. Introduction**

Virginia Woolf's eighth novel, *The Waves* (1931), consists of nine sections, each of which contains an italicised interlude and a series of soliloquies by the main characters, spanning from childhood to middle age. Throughout the work, the characters' development corresponds with the passage of time from morning until sunset depicted in the interludes: "The subject matter of the two prose series is juxtaposed, so that the passage from dawn to dusk is paralleled by the passage from youth to age" (Fleishman 153). Therefore, as James Naremore points out, "one would think that the individual egos would be most strongly emphasized in the fifth section, where the sun is at its zenith and gives to everything 'its exact measure of colour'" (163). However, the climax of the novel, the fifth section, contains only soliloquies by three of the six characters—Neville,

Bernard and Rhoda. I would like to examine Rhoda's soliloquy and suggest an explanation for her being chosen as one of the soliloquists in the fifth section only, along with the born poet (Neville) and story-teller (Bernard), and for what she writes there.

Not many critics have mentioned or valued the significance of the revelation Rhoda receives in the fifth section. Most of them generally discuss her fragility, instability of existence and inability and ignore her discovery which gives her a momentary exaltation and ability. James Naremore argues on the passage of her revelation that "there is an extremely bitter irony in Rhoda's words, almost a sneer at the pettiness of 'squares' and 'oblongs,' forms which leave 'very little outside,' but which do, after all, leave something out. The 'triumph' and 'consolation' are fragile and pathetic" (183) and does not perceive at all the positive impact the discovery has had on her. Hermione Lee observes Rhoda's oscillation "between an ideal vision of impersonality and serenity, evoked by her imaginary journeys and the satisfaction she finds in abstract shapes, and the torture of 'here and now'" (174) although she does not refer directly to the scene in the fifth section. She argues that Rhoda's suicide results from her failure to accept the real world, but does not mention further the "abstract shapes" she finds nor the glorious moment of revelation. Daniel Ferrer sees this scene as where "music enables Rhoda to tolerate, provisionally, the death of Percival" (85). This interpretation may account for the delight and relief she feels here, but it is not enough to explain her revelation and its significance for her. Maria DiBattista points out, when she refers to the scene in the fifth section, that "The triumph and consolation of the mind is in its ability to create semblances of reality, similes or metaphors—the 'like' and 'like' by which the mind connects the known with the unknown" (181). She seems to think that the sensation Rhoda gets here enables her to imitate reality and that the imitation is essentially imperfect. Although DiBattista finds a work of art which Rhoda makes in a later passage, she states Rhoda makes it in order to escape the world of reality and does not comment on her revelation.

Of course the importance of analysing Rhoda's instability of existence is obvious; however, to examine what her discovery and delight in the fifth section suggest might lead to a new reading of *The Waves*, since it will show Rhoda's long-overlooked positive aspects clearly and will be useful for a better understanding of her character and the contrast between Rhoda and the other characters, especially Bernard. By investigating her experience of revelation, the contrast and those within herself—between her happy moments and her fear and anxiety, and between the highest point of her life and her pitiful suicide—will be even sharper. I will try to show the influence and the result that her revelation has brought to Rhoda and to give a hint on a new reading of the work.

## 2. The “shock-receiving capacity” and the death of Percival

In her autobiographical essay written over the period from 1939 until 1940, “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf explains her motivation to write: “And so I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it” (*Moments of Being* 72). According to this essay, it seems Woolf believes that one can write only when s/he has such a “shock-receiving capacity.”

In this essay Woolf gives some instances of when she had “a sudden violent shock” (*Moments of Being* 71). Some of these memories are reflected in the experiences of the characters of *The Waves*: overhearing her parents talking about the suicide of a Mr. Valpy is portrayed as a strong impression of a “death among the apple trees” of Neville (17); Rhoda’s feeling of being unable to step across a puddle is one of the experiences of the author.

Thus Woolf describes some instances of receiving a shock in this work. Among them, the most shocking event for the characters of *The Waves* is the death of Percival, the silent but significant figure for each of the six soliloquists. Among the many critics who stress Percival’s significance, Maria DiBattista argues that Percival’s existence in *The Waves* veils the role of the work’s true narrator, the “She,” whom Woolf mentions in her diary,<sup>1)</sup> so that the “She” can “speak the truth” (151). She argues that the “dissimulation,” of this veil concealing the narrative voice of *The Waves*, is required so that the narrative voice can convey the truth unimpeded from behind. Percival’s name, “a name that denotes in its original French, to pierce the veil (*perce-voile*),” conceals “Woolf’s private memory and love of her late brother, Thoby Stephen” (DiBattista 152), behind the veil. Therefore, Percival’s existence in fact stands for a retrieval of a past for the author and a penetration of a veil. As she points out, images of various veils are abundant in *The Waves* (DiBattista 150), as if they conceal something vital behind the layers. Makiko Minow-Pinkney claims this abundance echoes Woolf’s famous description of life in “Modern Fiction” (177): “life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (*Collected Essays II* 106). Thus, “As *perce-voile*, Percival signifies a hole punched through the veil of consciousness”; however, if this claim is correct, “then to pierce this ‘veil of being’ is to risk death, and Percival’s name foreshadows his own premature end” (Minow-Pinkney 177). Thus agreeing with DiBattista’s claim that “the lady writing” (11) in Elvedon represents the work’s hidden narrator and the author herself (159-160), Minow-Pinkney argues that “Percival, narrativity and the patriarchy [of which she claims Percival is a representative in *The Waves*] must be simultaneously dislodged to allow Elvedon and women’s writing to emerge: hence the centre that Percival occupies must be emptied” (180). His dislodgement from the work has a tremendous impact on the characters, especially on Rhoda, since it eventually enables her to find some hidden truth, as I will argue in this thesis.

Percival's death allows (at least three of) the characters to glimpse through the "fissure" in the "continuity" of consciousness (70). Because to take this glimpse is a "risk," it requires a certain capacity—namely, the ability to handle a violent shock. The act of piercing the veil might give one a sense of "absolute despair" or "satisfaction" (*Moments of Being* 71) resulting from the sight of the hidden pattern or the truth. By soliloquising in the fifth section, the climax of the work where they contemplate the shock of Percival's death, Neville, Bernard and Rhoda prove their shock-receiving capacity, and consequently, their ability to write.

Beginning with "He is dead" (114), Neville's soliloquy in the fifth section shows his profound grief at the sad news. Even if we do not consider the homosexual affection he has for Percival, his natural response to the news of a close friend's death is depicted here. Neville's statement "I will not lift my foot to climb the stair. I will stand for one moment beneath the immitigable tree, alone with the man whose throat is cut" (115) shows that with the recurrence of the old image of the apple tree and the dead man, his sense of life and death is reinforced by the news of Percival's death. Also, his ability to write is confirmed here once again. Although his perception "This is the truth" is followed immediately by the phrase "This is the fact," the "fact" he reports here is only stated in two simple sentences: "His horse tumbled; he was thrown" (114). In contrast, the succeeding statements demonstrate Neville's rich imagination. Such information as Neville refers to would hardly be found in the telegram announcing Percival's death. The mere "fact" of the news is here supplemented by his lavish imagery of the scene of his death in India, which obviously he would not know. Neville's writing ability is strongly influenced by the death of Percival, as can be seen in his depiction of Percival's end.

In contrast, because he is faced with the news of his son's birth at the same time, Bernard's reaction is not as straightforward or intense as Neville's. At the news of Percival's death he reflects "My son is born; Percival is dead. I am upheld by pillars, shored up on either side by stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask, and do not know" (115). Bernard is confused by these opposing events of birth and death. As a result he wants quietude, in order to recover from the shock. Percival's death has the power to force Bernard, who declares that he usually needs "the stimulus of other people" to make phrases (59), to seek solace, if only for a short time; however, though the news brings strong feelings, Bernard soon confesses he is bored and "glutted with sensations" and longs to be within "the machine" of society (119), pronouncing: "now I want life round me, . . . and the usual sounds of tradesmen calling on which to pillow my head after this exhaustion, and shut my eyes after this revelation" (120). It seems that he still prefers the "non-being" (*Moments of Being* 70) of everyday life to the hidden truth at this point. Unlike Neville, who is determined to stay with his vision of death and to indulge himself in mourning for Percival, Bernard eventually "go[es] straight . . . down the stairs" and heads for Jinny's room,

where she waits with her “hoard of life” (47), that is, her material world. There Bernard will regain a sense of company, and his ability of phrasemaking. Thus he postpones the full impact of Percival’s death, to which he will return in his final soliloquy.

### **3. Rhoda’s revelation**

For Bernard and Neville, the shock of Percival’s death enhances their writing abilities. Rhoda too has strong emotions regarding Percival’s death, although in her case it seems slightly different from grief. At first she expresses her loathing of the world and her desire to die, emotions caused by Percival’s death. In her desperation, it even seems that “Rhoda cannot really mourn Percival’s death since she envies it so much” (McGavran Jr. 70). As she wanders around the city, she feels lonely and helpless. Here she experiences the utmost instability and anxiety of her existence. Coming back to Bernard and Neville, we find that their childhood experiences of revelation have brought them an understanding of the contrast between life and death. The author’s own experiences also have influenced them. However, in Rhoda’s case, her experiences in which Woolf’s own “moments of being” are reflected show only Rhoda’s anxiety and instability of existence, not her moments of revelation and exaltation. Rhoda’s experience of feeling stuck in front of a puddle (47) is a direct reflection of the author’s own experience. Rhoda’s life as she realises here is one where identity escapes her (47), just as her creator felt that “the world became unreal” (*Moments of Being* 78). Rhoda realises that life, with its “fissures” to cover over, is something that brings on a sense of danger.

Rhoda’s soliloquy in the fifth section begins with the descriptions of her two painful experiences which deprive of her “All palpable forms of life” (120): crossing the puddle, and the sound of “the great grindstone within an inch of [her] head” (120). With these annoyances, Rhoda wonders what concrete thing she can rely on to gain some stability. The last of the two experiences, that of the grindstone, is found again in Woolf’s essay “A Sketch of the Past,” where Woolf recalls her feelings after Thoby Stephen’s death, reflecting that from this experience she “came to think of life as something of extreme reality” (*Moments of Being* 118). Despite her recognition of life as “the real thing,” Rhoda, with the puddle and the grindstone in mind, goes on doing everyday things, in what we can understand as Woolf’s “non-being.”

However, upon entering a music hall her state of mind undergoes a change. A “sea-green woman” (123) appears on the stage and her singing voice strikes Rhoda, forcefully and straightforwardly: “She sucks in her lips, assumes an air of intensity, inflates herself and hurls herself precisely at the right moment, as if she saw an apple and her voice was the arrow into the note, ‘Ah!’” (123). This singing voice brings revelation to Rhoda. The following vision is that which Rhoda sees after experiencing this revelation:

Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling-place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon the squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation. (123)

The answer to the question when and what Rhoda will write can be found in her experience in the music hall. She could not even complete one sentence when she was small, but Percival's death gives her the "gift" and she is impressed by the voice of the singer. These two experiences enable her to "see the thing." What she sees here, "the thing," is "the structure" made of "a square" and "an oblong," which she recalls several times later. This she calls "a perfect dwelling-place," and feels "triumph," "consolation" and "content" to have discovered it. The "structure" Rhoda sees here is a very simple one and her experience reminds us of the "hidden pattern" that Woolf explains in "A Sketch of the Past":

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (*Moments of Being* 72)

The "pattern" that is "hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life" and the idea of the world as "a work of art" with which "all human beings . . . are connected" can be found in Rhoda's soliloquy when she hears the voice of the singer. When she hears the song, she thinks "'Like' and 'like' and 'like'—but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing" (123). Shortly before

this comment, when the audience is waiting for the singer to appear on stage, sentences containing “like” appear a number of times. Having eaten their fill of lunch, the audience (including Rhoda herself) is described in the following manner: “we cluster *like* maggots on the back of something that will carry us on” (122, emphasis added), “Swaying and opening programmes, with a few words of greeting to friends, we settle down, *like* walruses stranded on rocks, *like* heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea, hoping for a wave to lift us” (122-123, emphases added). Rhoda emphasises here that people look bulging with food, a vital element for sustaining life. She finds out “the thing” that lies behind and makes the “semblance” of, Woolf’s “some real thing behind appearances,” i.e. death. Rhoda can explain this by virtue of the “gift” that Percival’s death has bestowed on her: “The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated.” Things become clearer for her and she can feel just an intense pleasure, as the things she has feared are put into words, and she will no longer hurt. This too corresponds to the idea Woolf explained in “A Sketch of the Past” that the hidden enemy can hurt her no longer once she expresses it in words. The “structure” Rhoda finds here is the “pattern” Woolf claims to be “behind the cotton wool” and which indicates what everyone is connected to. What every human being and every living thing is inevitably connected to, what we cannot avoid, is death; Rhoda could not appreciate it earlier in the work, since she was not capable of explaining it in words. She could only fear it behind the veil of daily life, at night in bed or in front of a puddle. Now Rhoda is conscious here of both life and her inevitable death. She expresses through the simple figures that she now realises she (and other people as well) is included in the design of the world of life and death. She plays her part there by drawing her own “work of art,” which demonstrates that she might be a potential artist just as Neville and Bernard are.

Woolf notes that one of her own experiences of “moments of being,” when she makes the discovery with a flower, is an instance of satisfaction but not of despair<sup>2)</sup>. She thought she found the truth about the wholeness of the plant, which enabled her to explain the sensation it gave her. When she thought that the flower was part of an abstract figure or the earth and noted “That is the whole” (*Moments of Being* 71), she kept this discovery in mind for later use. It seems that in Rhoda’s experience in the music hall Woolf utilises her own childhood discovery to its full extent, because it gives Rhoda a very strong (but only momentary) feeling of rapture and satisfaction. She finds the perfect structure made of a square and an oblong and feels triumphant and confident. Here she does not fear physical contact. A strong sensation has hit Rhoda but she does not need to be afraid now that she can find the words to describe it. Here she experiences pure delight and shows it without restraint. In no other part of the work does she express her emotions, especially her delights, so clearly or contentedly. This scene of Rhoda’s revelation can clearly be associated with Woolf’s own explanation of her motivation to write—she says she needs to describe the

strong feelings she has had in order to deal with them successfully. The correspondence between Rhoda's revelation and that of the author can be considered to strongly suggest that Rhoda has the ability to write, at least for a time.

In fact, Rhoda indulges in a similar innocent pleasure much earlier when she floats flower petals in a basin in the first section. As McGavran notes, "Rapt in a miniature dream-world of her own devising and direction, Rhoda thinks, or permits herself to think, she has escaped the agonies of self and other" (67). Rhoda herself also says she has "a short space of freedom" (12). However, shortly after this she feels terror at figures in the classroom when she cannot understand the mathematical questions written on the blackboard. As a result of her escape into her "short space of freedom," she is forced to feel alone in the classroom. Such "flights into fantasy . . . will inevitably be followed by the cruel shock of re-entry" (McGavran Jr. 67) and she finds herself excluded from the real world to which the others belong naturally. After she experiences her revelation, however, this feeling changes completely. Now she knows the truth which everybody is attached to, so that she no longer has to fear that she is excluded; hence she exultantly declares, "This is *our* triumph; this is *our* consolation" (123; emphases added). The plural form is significant in that it implies Rhoda's sense of belonging.

The vocabulary she uses in the scene where the singer begins to sing signifies that she sees life and death instinctively. The audience wait for the opening "gorged with food, torpid in the heat," when "the sea-green woman comes to [their] rescue" and sings the first note: "as if she saw an apple and her voice was the arrow into the note, 'Ah!'" (123) The words used in the simile here, "apple" and "arrow," are associated with the childhood revelations which Neville and Bernard experiences: the "immitigable" apple trees that Neville relates to death and the "bright arrows of sensation" that Bernard feels in the bath. What the "sea-green woman" does to save Rhoda from the heaviness of the body (which is described here as a symbol of life) is to remove the "non-being" that blunts the sensibility and to "let [her] see the thing" behind it.

While the image of "arrows of sensation" that Bernard feels is shared by other characters in the work, at the same time this image symbolises death for Rhoda. In the second section, she dreams every night of her own death, in order to arouse the interest of her imaginary audience: "At night, in bed, I excite their complete wonder. I often die pierced with arrows to win their tears" (31). At this point she escapes from reality into her dream land and feels happy with the events there. She must "bang [her] hand against some hard door to call [herself] back to the body" (31) to sustain her sense of the body. She is afraid of being blown away, of "fall[ing] down into nothingness" (31), and thinks of risking her life only as a means of "win[ning people's] tears" in her imaginary world. Here the "arrows" are a mere weapon for her. In the third section the arrows attack her again: "A million arrows pierce me. Scorn and ridicule pierce me" (79). Under this

“immense pressure” on her, she “must prevaricate and fence them off with lies” (79). In spite of all these fears, the voice of the singer makes her aware of the fact that death is inescapable for everyone and puts her mind at ease. This time the “arrows” play a role of guiding her straight towards a revelation.

If the sentence Rhoda writes, or the “structure” she depicts, signify death, the simple pattern made of a square and an oblong may well be conceived as a tomb, or a coffin beneath a tombstone. The fact she has found her “shock-receiving capacity” and expresses it is tantamount to having found “a perfect dwelling-place,” and with this knowledge she need no longer be afraid.

In “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf recalls a childhood memory when she went to the station with her brother George Duckworth and her sister Vanessa Stephen to meet her other brother Thoby Stephen, shortly after their mother Julia Stephen died:

But I have one memory of great beauty. A telegram had been sent to Thoby at Clifton. He was to arrive in the evening at Paddington. . . . and so I was taken in a cab with George and Nessa to meet Thoby at Paddington. It was sunset, and the great glass dome at the end of the station was blazing with light. It was glowing yellow and red and the iron girders made a pattern across it. I walked along the platform gazing with rapture at this magnificent blaze of colour, and the train slowly steamed into the station. It impressed and exalted me. It was so vast and so fiery red. The contrast of that blaze of magnificent light with the shrouded and curtained rooms at Hyde Park Gate was so intense. Also it was partly that my mother’s death unveiled and intensified; made me suddenly develop perceptions, as if a burning glass had been laid over what was shaded and dormant. Of course this quickening was spasmodic. But it was surprising—as if something were becoming visible without any effort. (*Moments of Being* 92-93)

When Woolf gazes at the “pattern” that the girders make on the glass and the blazing sunlight “with rapture,” the scene not only impacts her deeply but impresses upon her even more the fact of her mother’s death. This contrasts with the house where gloom pervades after the mother’s death, improving her perception and making her feel that “something were becoming visible.” The vocabulary she uses in this passage is remarkably similar to the words Rhoda uses to describe her revelation after Percival’s death. This too indicates that the “structure” or the “pattern” Rhoda apprehends can be related directly to death.

#### **4. Bernard and Rhoda’s “ends in view”**

Rhoda’s exaltation seen in the fifth section does not last long. In the seventh section her soliloquy appears to be a “summing up” of her life, from childhood to her revelation, after which

she climbs a hill in Spain. Her words here sound as if she is already determined to kill herself, which foreshadows her eventual suicide. In the eighth section her hatred of life seems stronger than ever. At the table of the reunion dinner she accuses the other five for indulging in “non-being” and dreams again of her imaginary world (170-172). It is now revealed that she has broken up with Louis, who used to be her lover and talk to her as if they were “conspirators” (105), and in the final section, we hear from Bernard that she has killed herself. The vision of the “structure,” the sense of wholeness, that she embraces in the music hall (in the fifth section), seems to be short-lived.

So we must ask, is the hidden “truth” of life and death not powerful enough to keep her alive? What is the difference between Rhoda and Bernard, who “sum[s] up” (183) the whole work in the final part—the Bernard, who keeps writing, making phrases, till the end? Both characters undergo revelations at some points in their lives, therefore receive the shock and penetrate beyond the veil of being to the truth.

Daniel Ferrer points out that, “If we note that the arrival of the sun at the zenith (i.e., the beginning of its decline) is immediately followed by the brutal announcement of the death of Percival, solar hero, and if we do not forget that Percival represented for Virginia Woolf her brother Thoby, we can establish the equation sun=Percival=Thoby” (75-76). As the flow of time in the interludes and the development of the six characters in life correspond to each other, this equation seems to be reasonable to some extent.

Rhoda consistently fears that she might “fall down into nothingness” (31), losing her fragile individuality, and as soon as she finds the truth in her “moment of being” in the fifth section, her downfall begins, since the moment is her “end.” Rhoda’s life culminates in the fifth section, where the sun reaches the top; her life begins to fall towards her end, death, with the decline of the sun, and she compares the imaginary feeling on her deathbed to going under water: “Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under” (158).

Rhoda confesses in the fourth section that one of the causes of her instability is her sense of having “no end in view” (97). Because of this sense of lack she goes through serious fragmentation; she “do[es] not know how to run minute to minute and hour to hour, solving them by some natural force until they make the whole and indivisible mass that you call life” (97-98). Here too she imitates what others do in order “to have lodgement” and thereby “live wholly, indivisibly and without caring” (98). This manner seems to work for her in the end, for in the eighth section she does not “avoid the shock of sensation” of recognition any more when coming to the reunion dinner (170). However, she has only learned to behave as if she does not care and she resents the others’ ordinary life “made of repeated moments run together,” when she has “no face” (171). She will be able to say that “Here is the end” when she looks out on “a landscape,”

where she finds some “shape” (104). However, she longs for the landscape because she wants to fill her nights with “dreams,” to escape from the factual world that starts “from Percival and Susan, here and now” (104). She seems to hate that the others’ presence lies between herself and the dreamland and to want to stay away from what makes her aware of life and reality. At the table of the farewell dinner, she comes close to the hidden truth as, if only she cares to pay enough attention, she may be able to penetrate the veil of being. Yet she fails to reach her target, partly because Percival is still there at this point, hiding the truth behind his presence. So Rhoda thinks that aside from dreams “All else is trial and make-believe” (104).

In the fifth section, when she perceives the hidden “structure,” Rhoda finally declares: “Wander no more, I say; this is the end” (123). This declaration can be understood in two ways, though in the end they signify the same thing: that is, Rhoda here reaches her goal, or she makes up her mind to bring her own life to an end, as it will form the “perfect dwelling-place” for her (123). She assumes that the “end in view” for the others might be “one person . . . to sit beside,” “an idea,” or their “beauty” (98); here she regards an “end in view” as something people may pursue in their lives. This applies also to Bernard when he says that so many people work “to achieve the same end—to earn our livings” (201). However, as the word “end” is also used by Bernard when he suspects whether there is such a thing as “the end of the story” or whether stories exist at all (205), it can be understood in this way also in Rhoda’s case. After seeing the truth in the music hall, she repeatedly expresses her desire to commit suicide, even imagining herself dying on a mule-back when she is climbing the Spanish hill (157). Her last words in *The Waves* are “my purpose,” which suggest her determination to end her own life (178).

### **5. The importance of “words of one syllable”**

The chief difference of Bernard and Rhoda may lie in whether they realise the significance of “words of one syllable” (220). Certainly Bernard does; after a long toil of seeking “stories” and the right phrases for them, he eventually finds in the final section that what is necessary is “some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words,” not perfect sentences he has been looking for (183).

On the other hand, Rhoda misses their cruciality, even though she reaches the truth with the help of the female singer’s cries in the music hall. Her arrow-like voice raises a question in Rhoda as well as bringing a revelation: “‘Ah!’ cried a woman to her lover, leaning from her window in Venice. ‘Ah, ah!’ she cried, and again she cries ‘Ah!’ She has provided us with a cry. But only a cry. And what is a cry?” (123) These phrases resemble the question Bernard has about phrases and stories when he is grown up (“A phrase. An imperfect Phrase. And what are phrases?” (166)). Rhoda has not been associated with writing before the music hall scene and explains the

“structure” she sees here for the first time.

She is contrasted with Bernard, who can produce from the beginning a number of insignificant phrases but later discovers himself to be a failure. The voice of the woman is the simple language or voice of which Bernard gradually notices the importance and it is also the music he needs rather than elaborate sentences (“there should be music; . . . a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song to replace these flagging, foolish transcripts—how much too deliberate! how much too reasonable!—which attempt to describe the flying moment of first love” (192); “but what is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan?” (193)). Bernard is well aware of the effect and the importance of music, when he marvels “How impossible to order them [the faces of friends] rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole—again like music” (197). He actively seeks out the effect of music in order to tell a story of his life in a whole; he even buys a painting of Beethoven, when he apprehends his role as a successor who is destined to carry on “the whole of life” of human being (195).

In contrast, Rhoda misses the effect that music brings for her. She undervalues the cries of the singer: she notices with what precision “The players take the square and place it upon the oblong,” the accuracy of their musical performance (123). Yet her attention is directed solely to the structure of the production, not to the music and the cries that produce it.

In short, Rhoda succeeds in discovering the “hidden pattern” in the fifth section, much earlier than Bernard, who starts to seek the pattern in the final section; however, she does not notice the importance of the cries of the singer, which would have enabled her to tolerate the pressure that the hidden truth entails. Bernard successfully finds it out in the end; therefore when at last he realises that “Death is the enemy,” he can “fling [himself]” against it, “unvanquished and unyielding,” ending his long soliloquy with the words of one syllable, “O Death!” (228). The vocabulary used here reminds us of Rhoda’s courageousness when she experiences a revelation: “I will fling myself fearlessly into trams, into omnibuses” (124). Although they both have boldness in these similar expressions, Rhoda, who has missed the crucial significance of such simple words at the moment of her revelation, is unable to recover from the shock of perceiving the truth. The fact that her death is told through Bernard suggests as a short-lived writer, she cannot deliver to the reader her own words at the last moment of her life.

## **6. Conclusion**

In *The Waves* Rhoda believes that the delightful moment she experiences in the fifth section is for her an “end,” whether an aim or a terminal point, of her life. Therefore, her life after that which she reports in the seventh and eighth sections, is an excess for her. Her “end” is kept to

herself exclusively, whereas Bernard seeks some “end” of his summary, which includes all the others, and eventually, the whole human being.

Rhoda gets the ability to write in the fifth section, though temporarily, and has a glimpse of the design of life and death behind the veil of being. With the news of Percival’s death and the help of the singer in the music hall, Rhoda is able to perceive the hidden truth much earlier than Bernard, who realises it in the final section. However, the differences of the two characters are so obvious as to make Bernard observe Rhoda as his “opposite” (216). Bernard courageously faces the enemy he finds out at last, with the help of the words of one syllable, unlike Rhoda, who enjoys a great delight of revelation, but cannot perceive the significance of her experience enough to face her own life and death. She is given the key to tolerate the shock she receives, but fails to take advantage of her experience of revelation. Thus Bernard is left alone to soliloquise to a stranger his friends’ and his own lives and deaths, including Rhoda’s suicide, on which she does not leave her own words of any syllables.

### Notes

- 1) “A mind thinking. . . . But who is she? I am very anxious that she should have no name. I don’t want a Lavinia or a Penelope: I want ‘She’”(Diary III 229-230).
- 2) “[The experience about the flower] ended . . . in a state of satisfaction. When I said about the flower ‘That is the whole,’ I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore. . . . in the case of the flower I found a reason; and was thus able to deal with the sensation. I was not powerless. I was conscious—if only at a distance—that I should in time explain it.” (*Moments of Being* 71-72)

### References

- Bowlby, Rachel. *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988. Print.
- Burns, Christy L. “Re-Dressing Feminist Identities: Tensions between Essential and Constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 40.3 (1994): 342-364. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 July 2010.
- DiBattista, Maria. *Virginia Woolf’s Major Novels: The Fables of Anon*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980. Print.
- Ferrer, Daniel. *Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Fleishman, Avrom. *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1975. Print.
- Freeman, Barbara Claire. “Moments of Beating: Addiction and Inscription in Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Sketch of the Past’.” *Diacritics*. 27.3 (1997): 65-76. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 July 2010.
- Hulcoop, John F. “Percival and the Porpoise: Woolf’s Heroic Theme in *The Waves*.” *Twentieth Century*

- Literature*, 34.4 (1988): 468-488. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 November 2010.
- Hussey, Mark. *Virginia Woolf A to Z: A Comprehensive Reference for Students, Teachers and Common Readers to Her Life, Work and Critical Reception*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.
- Leach, Laurie F. "'The Difficult Business of Intimacy': Friendship and Writing in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*." *South Central Review*. 7.4 (1990): 53-66. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 July 2010.
- Lee, Hermione. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*. London: Methuen, 1977. Print.
- Lucenti, Lisa Marie. "'Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: To Defer that 'appalling moment.'." *Criticism* 40.1 (1998): N. Pag. Rpt. In *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. 178. Detroit: Gale, 2006. *Literature Resources from Gale*. Web. 15 July 2010.
- McGavran, James Holt, Jr. "Shelley, Virginia Woolf, and *The Waves*: A Balcony of One's Own." *South Atlantic Review*. 48.4 (1983): 58-73. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 July 2010.
- Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987. Print.
- Naremore, James. *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973. Print.
- Paulsell, Stephanie. "Writing and Mystical Experience in Marguerite d'Oingt and Virginia Woolf." *Comparative Literature*, 44.3 (1992): 249-267. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 November 2010.
- Vandivere, Julie. "Waves and Fragments: Linguistic Construction as Subject Formation in Virginia Woolf." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42.2 (1996): 221-233. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 October 2010.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Essays*. Vol. 2. 1966. London: Hogarth Press, 1972. Print.
- . *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. London: Sussex UP, 1976. Print.
- . *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. 5 vols. London: Hogarth Press, 1977-1984. Print.
- . *The Waves*. 1931. London: Penguin Books, 2000. Print.