Excerpts from *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf

with discussion by Gillian Beer

“Here is a hall where one pays money and goes in, where one hears music among somnolent people who have come here after lunch on a hot afternoon. We have eaten beef and pudding enough to live for a week without tasting food. Therefore we cluster like maggots on the back of something that will carry us on. Decorous, portly – we have white hair waved under our hats; slim shoes; little bags; clean-shaven cheeks; here and there a military moustache, not a speck of dust has been allowed to settle anywhere on our broadcloth. 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, but we are too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies between us and the sea. We lie gorged with food, torpid in the heat. Then, swollen but contained in slippery satin, the sea-green woman comes to our rescue. 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!’

“An axe has split a tree to the core; the core is warm; sound quivers within the bark. ‘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? Then the beetle-shaped men come with their violins; wait; count; nod; down come their bows. And there is ripple and laughter like the dance of olive trees and their myriad-tongued grey

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doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00253

leaves when a seafarer, biting a twig between his lips where the many-backed steep hills come down, leaps on shore.

"'Like' and 'like' and 'like' – but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? 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 squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation.

"The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates understanding. Wander no more, I say; this is the end. The oblong has been set upon the square; the spiral is on top. We have been hauled over the shingle, down to the sea. The players come again. But they are mopping their faces. They are no longer so spruce or so debonair. I will go. I will set aside this afternoon. I will make a pilgrimage. I will go to Greenwich. I will fling myself fearlessly into trams, into omnibuses. As we lurch down Regent Street, and I am flung upon this woman, upon this man, I am not injured, I am not outraged by the collision. A square stands upon an oblong. Here are mean streets where chaffering goes on in street markets, and every sort of iron rod, bolt and screw is laid out, and people swarm off the pavement, pinching raw meat with thick fingers. The structure is visible. We have made a dwelling-place."

[. . .]

"Should this be the end of the story? a kind of sigh? a last ripple of the wave? A trickle of water to some gutter where, burbling, it dies away? Let me touch the table – so – and thus recover my sense of the moment. A sideboard covered with cruets; a basket full of rolls; a plate of bananas – these are comfortable sights. But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it. Sitting up late at night it seems strange not to have more control. Pigeon-holes are not then very useful. It is strange how force ebbs away and away into some dry creek. Sitting alone, it seems we are spent; our waters can only just surround feebly that spike of sea-holly; we cannot reach that further pebble so as to wet it. It is over, we are ended. But wait – I sat all night waiting – an impulse again runs through us; we rise, we toss back a mane of white spray; we pound on the shore; we are not to be confined. That is, I shaved and washed; did not wake my wife, and had breakfast; put on my hat, and went out to earn my living. After Monday, Tuesday comes.

"Yet some doubt remained, some note of interrogation. I was surprised, opening a door, to find people thus occupied; I hesitated, taking a cup of tea, whether one said milk or sugar. And the light of the stars falling, as it falls now, on my hand after travelling for millions upon millions of years – I could get a cold shock from that for a moment – not more, my imagination is too feeble. But some doubt remained."

–Excerpts from *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf. Copyright 1931 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Copyright © renewed 1959 by Leonard Woolf. Use by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Used by permission of The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf.

Virginia Woolf imagined and wrote *The Waves* through numerous drafts and versions over four years of intense emotional, political, and social involvement.[1] Her association with the Working Women's Guild was time- and thought-consuming, her love affair with Vita Sackville-West was at its height, her health was uncertain. During this period, from September 1926 to February 1931, she also published her magical mock-biography *Orlando* (1928), with its playful and disruptive challenges to class, gender, and death, and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), her first major polemic against the current ordering of society with its disadvantaging of women. *The Waves* (1931) was mused on in the midst of all this other activity and not sequestered from it, though it moved in other directions. It was to be radically innovative, even, and boundless. It sought new ways to tell life-stories. But it also wanted to tell life itself. Writing against the grain of the novel genre was hard and compelling work. The luminous sentences, precise and flagrant, fell into rhythms of repetition and accretion.

Woolf told her friend the composer Ethel Smyth that she wrote the book to a rhythm not a plot,[2] but behind it lie two inevitable orders: each day the sun rises, reaches its zenith, and declines; each person moves from childhood through maturity toward old age and death. The sun is single, its effects multiple, colossal and minute. But the individual life is never single – rather, lateral, overlapping, recoiling. The singleton motion of the life span is warped, enriched, and embroiled in the lives of others. The insistent present is iridescent with the multiple past. That past reaches through personal history into the cold dark of the universe as well as the antiquity of Egypt and primeval creatures. The body is *now*, in all its richness and absurdity from the childhood bath on into old age:

> Water pours down the runnel of my spine. Bright arrows of sensation shoot on either side. I am covered with warm flesh. My dry crannies are wetted; my cold body is warmed; it is sluiced and gleaming. Water descends and sheets me like an eel. (19)

These varying motions dapple the surface of Woolf's language in *The Waves*. The book explores the intimate individualities of six people – three women, three men – who know each other across their shared lifetimes but come together only infrequently once they are adults. We see them in childhood, at school, at university and in youth, out to dinner together, visiting Hampton Park, and in the case of Bernard, in old age: their thoughts range across time and tangle together events, images, and repeated emotions. They are very different from each other in their sexualities and sensibilities though close in social class. The method of representing each person's consciousness is through direct reported present-tense utterance. The last vestige of the conventional narrator is held in the unvarying past-tense and inexpressive speech tag, "said Bernard," "said Jinny," "said Neville," "said Rhoda," "said Susan," "said Louis." In this book, the effect is of quiet ritual rather than presiding narrative presence. Moreover, utterance here does not imply speech but rather a threshold voice, heard in the reader's ear alone and following the skeins of thought, passion, senses, and feeling within the mind. Neither spoken aloud nor sealed within consciousness these utterances can be received by the other people in the book as well as the reader, but seem to dwell on a threshold between thought and speech.

I have come to love the book partly for what it can make happen in a group. It is integral to several of my most poignant experiences as a teacher, and as a listener. It is a book about the everyday, forthright

and mysterious. It embraces the ridiculous and does not seek to smooth out incongruity. It is a merciful book, and a book for all times of life. I first read it in my early twenties and now I'm in my seventies – as old as is Bernard at the book's end. Some works wane, but in the course of time, for me, *The Waves* has gathered. Recently I sat above the sea and heard the thump and withdrawal of the waves, *hors* meaning, restful, powerful, their systems invisible, their forms fleeting and manifest: unstoppable. Reading *The Waves* we must trust its process from page to page with some of the same quiescence and alertness that sea-sound induces in us. The book assuages narrative anxiety once we follow its rhythms. But it is also the vehicle of passion and ferocity.

The Waves, moreover, is a work of extraordinary sensory directness, with sentences that make your finger-ends fizz.

> Neville: "Yet that crimson must have burnt in Titian's gizzard." (129)

The fizz of this sentence comes through your ears as well as your eyes: those clustered *R*s and *M*s and *N*s siphon down toward the assonance of "Titian's gizzard," which is an exercise for the tongue even when silently voiced. And the false trigger of the earlier *S* in "crimson" summons "burst," behind "burnt." Taste becomes violence, becomes color. All our senses commingle as we read. And this is just one sentence in the midst of a paragraph in a fluid procession of lapsed and recovered moments.

My first encounter with the work was almost accidental. I was invited to teach a summer course at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. It was my first visit to the United States. The syllabus had already been set before I was involved, and I felt a slight pang of dismay when I saw *The Waves* on the list, particularly because I had been told that the participants weren't university students. They included the owner of the town's gas station, a beset housewife with four young children at home, a man angry with his job as a counter-clerk, a young girl just out of education, and a retired man whose previous job I never discovered. How they all contrived to be there impressed me at the start.

At the first meeting they told me how much they hated this book. They couldn't read it. It was obscure, aloof, nothing like real life. I wasn't sure how much I liked it either. We set to work, reading passages aloud, watching the stories accumulate and unspool, puzzling over the difference and likeness of the people, listening to the uncensored run of thoughts and images set just below the level of speech. That was what first caught people's interest: it was how we habitually live, articulate and unwary, at ease in the unuttered, thinking things we would never own aloud. And this book didn't blame us for that process; it didn't chastise or judge. Here we could enter through a blatant silence into six persons' heads and experience a new kind of intimacy.

Woolf thought that she had done away with characters and was puzzled by reviews that emphasised the individuals.[3] What emerged in the summer group was a fascination with the six individuals and the way they gradually resolved into known people – in the way indeed that known people resolve, after time, but never quite securely. It became clear that when dipping into the book, the particular voices could be recognized at once, partly because of their preoccupations but also because of the shape of their sentences, their adversarial relations to each other's identity. Yet their reactions could not always be foreseen, as when the devoted wife and mother Susan suddenly thinks, "I am sick of my own craft, industry and cunning, of the unscrupulous ways of the mother who

protects, who collects under her own jealous eyes at one long table her own children, always her own" (159). So the characters became food for ordinary gossip, an unexpected development, rousing a good deal of laughter, animation, and scorn. The events that are ordinarily foregrounded were here merely stated in the midst of a wider flow: Bernard married and had a son; Rhoda committed suicide; Louis made good in the city and was secretly a poet. A flood of speculation and intimate knowledge crowded into the group's conversation. What Woolf would have made of this I don't like to think, but she wasn't there. Her book was, and it engaged everyone in thinking about their own lives and the lives of others in new ways.

So this was my first encounter with the power of the work. Much later, I prepared an edition with an introduction and notes for Oxford World's Classics when Woolf briefly emerged from copyright in Britain in 1992.[4] Editing always compels immersion and slow reading, reading even at the pace of composition. You become part of the writing, marking the pauses between sentences, the fissures between paragraphs, the pressure of syntax on sense, the drag and the rapture of the writing hand. I was moved in quite new ways as I uncovered the traces of thought that led out to Woolf's life and to other writing in the book's rich allusive texture: Shelley, Catullus, and the fin in a waste of waters, her dead brother Thoby and the streets of London and its historic places open to everyone – St. Paul's (just then reopened after several years), the National Gallery, Hampton Court – the city's flow of people:

> "Here I stand," said Jinny, "in the tube station where everything that is desirable meets – Piccadilly South Side, Piccadilly North Side, Regent Street and the Haymarket. I stand for a moment under the pavement in the heart of London. Innumerable wheels rush and feet press just over my head." (160)

Immediately after these sentences Jinny, the flagrant metropolitan, so intoxicated with her own beauty and sex, suddenly sees herself as old: "I shall look into faces and see them seek some other face." The Lethean descent of bodies on the escalators momentarily makes her cower:

> I admit, for one moment the soundless flight of upright bodies down the moving stairs like the pinioned and terrible descent of some army of the dead downwards and the churning of the great engines remorselessly forwarding us, all of us, onwards, made me cower and run for shelter. (161)

Death haunts life; but Jinny revives. Repeatedly in this novel the humdrum becomes colossal and then reduces again to its ordinary scale: that pulse, expansion and contraction of emotional and physical scale, is attentive to ordinary experience in a way that is rarely registered in writing. (Sebald does it, too.) The rhythmic intensity of the characters' self-awareness, their shared and heightened language, their skeptic readings of each other's personalities, all answer to the unacknowledged fullness of the everyday. That recognition of the sheer scope of common experience is one of the gifts that Woolf gives the reader.

She gives it despite the narrow social range of the main participants. Woolf distrusted her own ability to capture working-class speech without caricature, and so she gradually abandoned, over the rewriting, her original intention to include a broad range of people: not only Roger who "of course, was among those who would have nurses"; but Albert, "the cowman's son," later "apprenticed to a linen-draper"; and also "Flora and Dorothy": "They would be going to schools in Switzerland about the same time that Florrie ~~had~~ went out

for the first time as kitchenmaid." Florrie cried all night after "being spoke to very severely by the cook" and "was then dismissed with a scolding." The narrator in the first version muses uneasily:

> No one could follow lives ~~which~~ like that; ~~witho~~ – without the intention (wandering on, the) which makes the eye squint & see only a ~~profile~~, an outline, an edge, of drawing comparisons & treating these rounded & entire figures as if they were ~~silhouettes cut out~~ fragments merely; one being half obscured by the other.[5]

Woolf knew something of these less privileged lives. While she was writing *The Waves* she was also writing an introductory letter for Margaret Llewelyn Davies's collection of letters written by Co-operative Working Women, *Life as We Have Known It*, which the Hogarth Press (owned by Woolf and her husband, Leonard) published in 1930.[6] There working women wrote first-person accounts of the difficulties and achievements of their lives. It may well have been reading those letters in direct address that made Woolf fully aware of the impossibility for her of rendering working-class speech so as to show the people as the "rounded and entire figures" they were. Instead of describing individuals, she includes everyone together propelled by "the churning of the great engines remorselessly forwarding us, all of us, onwards" (161).

A decade later a colleague and I ran a seminar on "speaking poetry," encouraging undergraduates to trust their voices, to pay attention to line ending and rhyme, and not to feel embarrassed by the rhythms of poetry. At the end of the course some of them wanted the class to continue informally, so I told them that I'd long had a fantasy of hearing the whole of *The Waves* read aloud. Six of them volunteered; three women, three men, a variety of voices, from Liverpool, from Kolkata, from Canada and Denmark, Great Yarmouth and Cambridge. Instead of the imagined sounds of 1930s upper-middle-class speakers, we had a gallimaufry of accents that opened the text out again to wider experience, as Woolf had initially wanted to do when she described it on the title page of the first draft as "The Moths or the life of anybody." I read the interludes. Each of the speakers read one of the characters. We sat in a shallow arc, and the only dramatization was that as each speaker rose to read, the previous speaker sat down. The effect was of waves moving. We read, with breaks between the sections, from ten in the morning until just before nine in the evening. The event was open, and people came in and out to listen; a few stayed through the entire sequence. The sun reached its zenith and declined and we ended with lamps and darkness, accompanying Bernard through his solitary meal while he ruminates on the body and time, and merges his own life with the lives of all his friends. What I gained above all from this group's work was the humor of these lives pressing against each other and swaying apart, the book's incongruities of mood and hope and desire. Absurdity is beautiful here, and sharply – sometimes sardonically – observed as well.

What we all experienced together was living through ages of ourselves that we had not yet encountered. One person said, "Now I know what it feels like to be middle-aged, to be old." And the students talked about learning how friendship survives through an arc of time and absences and estrangements: "Our friends – how distant, how mute, how seldom visited and little known" (229). We also experienced death, which comes at intervals all the way through life and not only at its end. The dead and the living are contiguous, not discontinuous: "It is strange how the dead leap out on us at street corners, or in

dreams" (229). The one silent character in *The Waves* is Percival, beloved of them all in different ways, an impermeable presence whose death halfway through the work marks the beginning of the end of old ways of being, of old empires.

Looking back on that experience of hearing the work read aloud, I realize that for me it also opened out analytically and emotionally its complex form, its affinity with chamber music.

As she worked on "the moths," her first imagining of what proved to be *The Waves*, Woolf wrote in her diary on 27 June 1927, thinking about how to set the scene:

> France: near the sea; at night; a garden under the window. I do a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas. (The windows fidget at their fastenings as if we were at sea.)[7]

Late Beethoven and the windows bump and rasp, the sound of the sea evoked: this is a new kind of music, merging instruments and natural sounds. Much later in the process of composition she muses: "It occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech."[8] The four instruments playing the quartet on the gramophone also interject and merge, each carrying its own voice and timbre in a complex colloquy that forms an enormous conversation. Woolf is seeking a prose that will move "as prose has never moved before: from the chuckle & the babble to the rhapsody."[9] Bernard in the last section of the book longs for a music "painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like pealing song" to replace the "flagging, foolish transcripts" (209). In a string quartet, the voices of the instruments entwine, all active, so that the music is more than each, each intent and listening. Though the recurrence, chase, and overlap of the voices in *The Waves* may suggest fugal form, the intricacies of quartet structure and performance are more outward reaching than fugue alone.[10] Music, and particularly the innovations and challenges of late Beethoven, are part of the process of composition in this work. So also is the start of Woolf's intense and difficult friendship with Ethel Smyth, that rarity for the time: a woman composer of large-scale music.

The scenes I've invited you to read bring music to the center of meaning and also ask questions about story. It is hard to disengage any passage from the rest of the book since so many of its effects are produced by the long-dispersed whispers and echoes and shouts that mesh the whole immense sequence together. Moreover, mood in this writing shifts so fast that an extract risks seeming fixed or portentous when in its full setting it is fleeting and contingent. This passage is, I hope, long enough to hear the limber writing ripple across moods.

This is the situation. Percival has died, far away in India. The "I" in this passage is Rhoda. From childhood on, Rhoda is the most isolated and chagrined of the group of friends. She is disgusted by the human, by the pressure of other people's bodies and presences. Here, grieving for Percival, she walks in Oxford Street among the crowds and then turns aside and enters what is clearly the Wigmore Hall, the intimate chamber-music hall. Woolf is always alert to how experience is charged by where it happens: in Southampton Row or Fleet Street, in the Strand or St. James's Park. Each lends a different timbre. So does Wigmore Hall, its quiet art-nouveau space recessed behind Oxford Street. It is a place of cultural privilege as well as of contemplation.

The passage opens as savage comedy. The "decorous, portly" audience are somnolent and overfed, outwardly refined, yet

their excess of "beef and pudding" brings on the thought of maggots and they transform, in the speed of a simile, into "walruses stranded on rocks," too heavy to reach the sea. They have entered the hall as respite from the heat and mainly to greet their friends. The "sea-green" singer, herself grotesque in slippery satin, "assumes an air of intensity," but the sound she makes abruptly reaches the core: "the core is warm; sound quivers within the bark." The repeated "Ah" becomes the sound of love, a primal sound, but not enough for rescue. Next come the "beetle-shaped men," the string players, the "ripple and laughter" of their harmonies evoking the seafarer, perhaps Odysseus on his return. Then Rhoda's language turns away from all these similes and their surface comforts: "'Like' and 'like' and 'like' – but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?" The fierce humor of excess despised is replaced by something lean, pure, fell, as the string quartet proceeds.

As a child Rhoda, left in the classroom to finish the sums she cannot understand, has experienced zero:

> Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join – so – and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, "Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!" (15)

Now, listening to the musicians in the face of death, she is at last included and finds a dwelling-place in the absolute geometry of meaning without language:

> 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. . . . Wander no more, I say; this is the end. The oblong has been set upon the square; the spiral is on top. We have been hauled over the shingle, down to the sea.

Like the sweep of Lily Briscoe's line and triangle in her picture achieved at last at the end of *To the Lighthouse*, the musicians resolve experience into an abstraction so extreme that it is all-encompassing, and comforting. Strikingly, though, the zero – the "o" that terrified Rhoda as a child – is here absent from the visual forms (square, oblong, spiral) and present only in the letters of the word "oblong."

Even this liberation and sweetness cannot last for Rhoda untainted by the imperfection of bodies. The paragraph continues: "The players come again. But they are mopping their faces. They are no longer so spruce or so debonair. I will go." But she goes, "fearlessly":

> As we lurch down Regent Street, and I am flung upon this woman, upon this man, I am not injured. I am not outraged by the collision. A square stands upon an oblong.

Strengthened by the music, Rhoda declares: "I will at last free the checked, the jerked-back desire to be spent, to be consumed." Her drive toward death is a drive toward completeness. The hidden image of the bitted horse comes to its fullness in the work's final paragraphs, where Bernard, facing his own death, imagines himself as a horseman spurring his steed onward. The grandiloquence of his assertion "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" is followed only by the italicized, neutralizing sentence: *The waves broke on the shore* (248).

Bernard's grandiloquence makes me uneasy, and perhaps is meant to do so. It harks back to the imperial vocabulary that surrounds Percival. No empire lasts, and yet death remains imperious. Bernard, the

storymaker and storyteller among the group, is always seeking ways of moving beyond the "phrases and fragments" with which he feeds his craft. He makes his friends into stories and deeply distrusts his own making. His incontinent curiosity discomfits him and makes him feel himself second-rate. He carries some of Woolf's technical burdens for her: "But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it" (223). The physical world is essential to his and to her creativity:

> Let me touch the table – so – and thus recover my sense of the moment. A side-board covered with cruets; a basket full of rolls; a plate of bananas – these are comfortable sights.

He relishes the comedy and grand guignol of the animal body:

> There is the old brute, too, the savage, the hairy man who dabbles his fingers in the ropes of entrails; and gobbles and belches; whose speech is guttural, visceral – well, he is here. He squats in me. Tonight he has been feasted on quails, salad, and sweetbread. (241)

Both Bernard and Woolf value routine as precious and as fundamental to living: "After Monday, Tuesday comes." Routine allows recovery and reminiscence. But always within and beyond those easeful stories with their pretended precision lies another realm, which discountenances the baleful continuity of narrative:

> There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at our appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights. (213)

These ways of being and of writing cannot be reconciled but they can coexist. Behind them lies the actuality of oceans whose waves cover more than half the globe and whose action never ceases. Woolf's encompassing metaphor of the waves is more than metaphor. It turns human eyes and ears upon the world we inhabit and cannot control.

This is a book that draws you back over time and takes you forward further than you could have imagined, into and beyond your own life. There is always more to discover than you had noticed. And each group of readers finds something else. I am grateful to the people with whom I have read the book: there is shared revelation in the experience. *The Waves* has a way of breeding friends across generations and of whispering questions that continue to disquiet.

[1] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves: The Two Holograph Drafts*, trans. and ed. J. W. Graham (Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1976). *The Waves* in the excellent recent *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Michael Herbert and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), includes a full chronology of the composition of the novel; see pp. ci – cxvii. *The Waves* was first published in the United Kingdom and United States in 1931 by the Hogarth Press. Page references in this essay (noted parenthetically) are to the edition I prepared for World's Classics (Oxford University Press, 1992), reissued as an Oxford World's Classic (1998, 2008).

[2] *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1888 – 1941*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1975 – 1980), vol. 4, 204.

[3] "Odd that they [*The Times*] shd. praise my characters when I meant to have none"; *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols. (London: Penguin, 1979 – 1985), vol. 4, 47. Woolf is rebelling against the practice of Arnold Bennett and other "realist" authors of the time who provided long descriptions of their characters and their surroundings.

[4] The introduction I wrote for that edition is collected together with essays on the other novels in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground: Essays by Gillian Beer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996). *The Waves* is now out of copyright again after the end of the seventy-year copyright period, which had been extended from fifty years in 1992.

[5] Quotations in this paragraph are from the J. W. Graham edition, pp. 67 – 68.

[6] For further discussion, see the introduction to the Herbert and Sellers edition, pp. xlix – li. See also, *passim*, Alison Light's brilliant study, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants* (London: Fig Tree, 2007).

[7] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 139.

[8] Ibid., vol. 3, 336.

[9] Ibid., vol. 4, 4.

[10] In the preface to her 1937 translation of *The Waves*, French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar writes briefly but compellingly about the fugue-like nature of the book's organization and its Mozartian allegros and andantes; see *Les Vagues* (Paris: Stock, 1937), v. The new study by Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), will greatly extend our understanding of Woolf's interweaving of music in her work.