Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*:

A Study on Modernism

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf is a British novelist who is regarded as one of the foremost modernist literary figures in the twentieth century. She is arguably the major lyrical novelist in the English language. She created stream-of-consciousness, and emphasized the inner psychological and emotional motives of characters. She also invented the various possibilities of fractured narrative and chronology in her works. She has been hailed as one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century and one of the foremost Modernists. Woolf's reputation declined after World War II, but her eminence was re-established with the surge of Feminist criticism in the 1970s. After a few more ideologically based alterations, not least caused by claims that Woolf was anti-semitic and a snob, it seems that a critical consensus has been reached regarding her stature as a novelist.

_The Waves_ is seen as one of the most experimental work by her. That’s just what interests me most. In my essay, I focus on the image of the waves. I study the meanings of the image of the waves as an important symbol in both the novel and the author’s life, including the metaphor as life and culture transition. I also propose that the image has close relationship with modernism. Barry lists some important characteristics of modernism, including: ‘1, A new emphasis on impressionism and subjectivity, that is, on how we see rather than what we see; …3, A blurring of the distinctions between genres, so that novels tend to become more lyric and poetic; 4, A new liking for fragmented forms, discontinous narrative, and random-seeming collages of disparate materials…’

How does the image of the waves contribute to the modernist characteristics of the novel? I mainly apply Barry’s theory to deal with this problem. I’ll analyze it from the following points:

To begin with, fragmental forms and discontinuous narration. The six voices and

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1 Barry, P. _Beginning Theory : An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory_. Manchester : Manchester University Press. 2002 P82
nine parts form the basic structure; secondly, the waves as a symbol in the novel. It has profound meanings beyond the natural wave. It is a symbol of unstable life and contemporary culture change; thirdly, the impression and subjectivity. The monologues of six persons indicate a strong stress on the subjectivity. Their recallings of the memories are presented in their own words which are very impressive; lastly, the blurring of genres. Influenced by modern art, it absorbs in many typical impressionist elements: color, feeling, emotion, obscure identity. Also Woolf wrote it in a more lyric way than that in a traditional novel. So it can be considered as a combination of modern art and literature genres.

I. Introduction of *The Waves*

*The Waves* was first published in 1931 and recognized as one of the most experimental work by Virginia Woolf. It was also accepted as the acme of Modernism. Its self-awareness was prefigural. In other words, the production of sound, figure and language were ahead of author’s consciousness in a way that she was obliged to go stumbling after her own seemingly autonomous voice. It revealed remarkable doubt on the stereotype of novel which was based on traditional plots and characters. Even Woolf herself said: it was elegiac and a play-poem. It is mainly about the stories of six persons, three women and three men. Everyone is different in personality and can be seen as a genre of human. Susan stands for natural wife and mother. Jinny is the serial lover of men. Rhoda is the psychological blank. Neville is homosexual. Louis is the Australian outsider. Bernard is a born storyteller. They talk about their growths and experiences before. Thus it can also be seen as a compound Bildungsroman.

II. The image of the waves and modernism

1. The meaning of the wave as a symbol

(1) life and wave
The wave is not only a natural object in the novel, it is obvious that it has some deeper meanings. It can be seen as an important symbol in the book. Generally speaking, the wave is the pattern of life, for both have similar characteristics:

1. Flux and changing all the time.

Woolf’s interest in silence and death lead her to see her art as an exercise that fuses existence and symbol. Life is full of ups and downs. Everyone will have happiness and sadness and will experience sickness, oldness, departure and death. Everything can happen. You cannot tell what will happen in the next minute. The wave of life moves on and on, making a natural circulation. The fates of the six friends are changing. They grew from children to adults and then advance to the death. Everyone has his/her own route of life. That’s not a straight line but a curve, just like wave. Then six persons form six waves. Their minds are changing with time, too. It’s an unstable process of life. For instance:

Rhoda does not despise words, and she is unable to fully assimilate herself into the social order, into culture, language, and a fixed identity. She is unable to accept her unified reflection. She knows that ‘everything changes and becomes luminous … Wherever she goes, things are changed under her eyes’ She is forced into a wave, swaying between her past and present, her language and identity. Longing to pull herself out of “these waters,” she nevertheless cannot, lamenting that “they sweep me between their great shoulders, I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths” 1, and again, “Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me” 2. Having no father to identify with, she can only fall back into the sea. Rhoda is not the mother, never identifies with either parent, or fixes a stabilizing identity at all. She is just among the commonest people who are passing around. In her confusion, she says ‘I like the passing of face and face and face, deformed, indifferent….I ride rough waters and shall sink with no one to save me’ 3. She endlessly vacillates, drawn

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2 Woolf, 1982, P139
3 Woolf, 1982, P107
by the sea, the rhythm of the waves, but, just before she lets herself drown, her identity dissolve, she tries to pull herself back, affirms that she is “a girl, here in this room.” She realizes that she must climb out of the sea, and that she can do this only through language, but, when the moment comes to speak, she finds she cannot.

Besides Rhoda, the male characters of The Waves, especially the two poets, are much concerned by the sea, the waves working their way into their language, their identities constantly being undermined, questioned, dissolved and re-assembled. For them, the linguistic playing with wave metaphors and the questioning of selfhood are self-reflective apart between moments in which they play different roles in lives as fathers, wealthy and successful businessmen, husbands, writers.

The waves of the sea are described by Bernard as rising and swelling, surging towards him as he stands “pawing this stretch of the pavement”—“What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us…?’” he asks, as the sea rushes towards him, “It is death. Death is the enemy’. The sea is not just any intrauterine bliss, therefore: it is explicitly named “Death”. Therefore, the waves take on a kind of pessimistic color in his side. Moreover, not only he concerns much about the waves, but his life route can also be depicted as a wave-like curve. When he is a child, he tells stories and grows smoothly, then he enters school and records phrases, this leads to the first peak of his life; but he misses chances to go play, so it falls down; when he becomes adult, he is engaged which indicates it rises up again, but quickly he questions about his identity and comes up with some pessimistic ideas, it lowers down; the birth of his son brings the line to a climax again, however, it turns down when he realizes he is getting old and needs to talk to people. From this description, we can see it’s a wave-like route of life.

2. Colorful: We can find many color words in the language which gives us an impression of visible picture. The description of the waves is not an exception.
Blue waves, green waves swept a quick fan over the beach.¹

The waves were steeped deep-blue save for a pattern of diamond-pointed light on their backs which rippled as the backs of great horses ripple with muscles as they move.²

The wave takes on different colors according to the sunlight. The rich color symbolizes the colorful life. Life is not like quiet water in the lake, but has many different sides. The stories of the six persons consist of happiness, exciting like red; sadness, like black and grey… Color is closely related to emotion, so it is especially emphasized in the modern art. Thus it is natural to become a powerful language tool of countering traditional writing techniques for modernist writers.

3. Woolf’s life and waves: The intention of writing life as fluxing and indeterminate is very much related to Woolf’s personal life. The author herself has unusual understanding of the uncertain life.

She believed the individual identity to be always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it: forces which were invisible emerge, others sink silently below the surface, and the past, on which the identity of the present moment rests, is never static, never fixed like fly in amber, but subject to alteration as consciousness that recalls it.³

Human are living thus changing. No one can predict the future. We were not born to be certain kind of person. We will change with our life experience. The writer was born in a family with high fame and all round her were celebrities in the British society at that time. But unfortunately, she lost her father, mother and sister when she was very young. It was so sudden that she could not accept the fact for a long time. She fell down into an abyss of misery and suffered painfully from mental crisis. She

¹ Woolf, 1982, P19
² Woolf, 1982, P101
³ See Moments of being Virginia Woolf edited by Jeanne Schulkind New York Harcourt 1985 P12
was too young to see death on her own. Therefore, we can detect a strong sense of desperate emotions on life. For her, life is actually the twin sister of death. No one can avoid ending up with death. Death is everyone’s fate. Life is all uncertain and flux. You can never know what will happen in some time. Perhaps, death will fall on you tomorrow. She expressed her deep pessimistic feelings towards life and death.

Besides this pessimistic emotions, she also thinks a lot about the past and present of individual life. In her mind, new experiences form the hides and take the place of previous old ones. In this way, life combines the old experiences and new ones and is pushed forward. The present moment is enriched by the past but the past is also enriched by the present. Most of Virginia Woolf’s works disclose such a view of self that emphasizes simultaneously the change and continuity of individual identity.

(2) Culture and time change

If we examine the background of the novel or the times the author lived, we can see the modernist movement spread a shock transition in most cultural fields. James Mcfarlane said in ‘The Mind of Modernism’ as this:

Individualistic, relativistic, Stockmann’s outburst marked the start of a complex and protracted change in the European mind, in which a growing instability was to be its most conspicuous feature.¹

The emphasis on fragmentation, on the deconstruction of the belief in general laws to which all life and conduct could be claimed to be subject, were all revolution of the human mind. Individual became center of the world. There came a re-structuring of parts, a re-relating of the fragmented concepts, a re-ordering of linguistic practice to

match what was felt to be the new order of reality. Human nature is no longer to be
contained by vast and exhaustive inventories of naturalistic detail arranged and sorted
under prescriptive heads but is uncertain, elusive, multiple, various and irreducible.

The waves can be seen as a cultural symbol. This novel is the corpse of the
literary canon, the mausoleum of white male English culture. The new fresh wind
blows the waves and buries the old tradition into the sea. This is most revealed on
Louis. India and London are mentioned in the novel. He describes London as follows:

‘The roar of London’, he said, ‘is round us. Motor-cars, vans, omnibuses pass and
repass continuously. All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate
sounds-wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards, of merrymakers-are churned into one
sound, steel blue, circular. Then a siren hoots. At that shore slip away, chimneys flatten
themselves, the ship makes for the open sea.’ ¹ From this, we can detect a kind of
lament for the city. ‘Our English past—one inch of light’² Bernard’s vision is more
pessimistically viewed by Louis the Australian T.S. Eliot figure who thinks ‘the lighted
strip of history is past and our Kings and Queens; we are gone; our civilization; the
Nile; and all life...we are extinct’³ Louis is most afraid of the dissolution of the
empire. He hears the great beast of revolution stamping on the shore. In his
monologue, the British businessman is concerned, spreading commerce, colonialism
and patriarchy with Napoleon, Plato, and Sir Robert Peel. His identity is so insecure
that he needs continual reinforcement of his class position from walking the slums. ‘I
am an average Englishman; I am an average clerk’ He tries to enter the main circle of
the society, but finds he ‘is not included. If I come from Canada or Australia, I who
desire above all things to be taken to the arms with love, am alien, external.’⁴ He
participates in the nineteenth-century construction of the subjectivity through totally
ambivalent internalizations of the city slum. These worries about the history and the
conflict between society and individual indicate the mental crisis prevailing common
people in modern times. The rise and the fall of waves explore the way in which the

² Woolf 1982 P153
³ Woolf 1982 P152
⁴ Woolf 1982 P63
cultural narrative ‘England’ is created by an Eton/Cambridge elite who reproduce the national epic (the rise of . . .) and elegy (the fall of . . .) in praise of the hero. The "poetic language" and "experimental structure" in *The Waves* are vehicles for a radical politics that is both anti-imperialist and anticanonical.

Bernard’s memories of Percival repeat the figure of oscillation of the force of cultural inheritance as a wave that drowns alternative voices. The story of Percival’s fall is countered by the story of how he raised the bullock cart and imposed his Western values on the lazy and incompetent natives. ‘I see India….I see a pair of bullocks who drag a low cart along the sun-baked road. The cart sways incompetently from side to side’\(^1\) For Woolf, this recurring fall is a primal scene of the Fall, England’s fall from heroic history, her family’s fall from ethical purity, her culture’s fall into colonialism and its anxiety. In *The Waves*, Woolf uses the case of her cousin to explain the deadlock embrace of violence and poetry in the English male cultural script. Her version of the fall and the poet’s mythologizing of violence is a critique of family history as well as cultural history.

III. Modernist analysis

i Brief introduction to modernism

Modernism is a trend of thought which affirms the power of human beings to make, improve and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation. The term covers a variety of political, cultural and artistic movements rooted in the changes in Western society at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Broadly, modernism describes a series of progressive cultural movements in art and architecture, music, literature and the applied arts which emerged in the decades before 1914. Embracing change and the present, modernism encompasses the works of artists, thinkers, writers and designers who rebelled against late 19th century academic and historicist traditions, and

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\(^1\) Woolf, 1982, P91
confronted the new economic, social and political aspects of the emerging modern world.

These developments began to give a new meaning to what was termed 'Modernism':

It embraced disruption, rejecting or moving beyond simple Realism in literature and art, and rejecting or dramatically altering tonality in music. The movement towards sophistication and mannerism, towards introversion, technical display, internal self-scepticism, has often been taken as a common base for a definition of Modernism.¹

Modernist spirit opposed to the old conventions - positive analytical objective generalized, logical, absolutist, impersonal, determinist, intellectual, machanistic. Instead, it stressed more on individual and personal experience, on the unconscious and indeterminate sides. Indifferences to external attachments, holding itself through the internal force of itself - this Flaubertuan dream of an order in art independent of or else transcending the humanistic, the material, the real, has been crucially important to a whole segment of modern arts. Human consciousness, especially artistic consciousness could become more intuitive, more poetic; art could fulfil itself. Modern stylistic revolution called for a change in human relationships. It set the artist free to be more himself because of stress on the individual experience. So in this way, modern spirit was developed beyond time and reality, the moral imperative of technique and patriarchal social conventions.

1. Fragmented forms and discontinuous narrative.

Modernism is a rebellion to the previous minds. It emphasizes on fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration of those systems, rules and certain

standards. Human nature is indeterminate and changeable, thus an urgent to fragmentation is created. Woolf rejects nineteenth century notion of fixed dramatic characters depriving identity from some abstracted notion whose actions are some simple direct effect of some cause. The artist comes into being through exposure to such shattering experiences.

The personal wave is diachronical, while six characters’ stories form the synchronical wave in the perspective of the whole novel. The diachronical and synchronical clues are interwoven to form the basic space and time of the novel. It marks a breakthrough to the old prefigural united structure of the novel. It actually consists of nine parts and six voices. The life of the six characters forms the wave. Six lines presented at the same time. They reminisced the growth process of their own in different time in a day. The whole story can be summed up according to the sun time. We can see nine waves in the novel.

I. The sun rises. Childhood

II. Midmorning. Early adolescence.

Adulthood: their love stories their work and emotions

III. Late morning.

IV. The sun approaches midday position.

V. Noon: The sun lies straight above casting no shadows.

VI. The sun’s rays are slanted.

Life is monotonous and begins to have no meaning.

VII. Late afternoon.

VIII. Evening.
IX. Night-their older life. Bernard is last to speak and spends the remaining of the text summing up his life and those of the others. He takes on Death and the waves crash on the shore.

Childhood, youth, adult, old age, these particular stages in one’s life are represented like waves-rise and fall, forward and backward, fluxing all the time. The waves contribute a lot to the structure of the novel. Though the novel isn’t composed by chapters, we can discern clearly that there are nine parts which describe different stages of the growth processes of the six characters. Because at the beginning of every part, there are lyric descriptions of natural scene of the waves under the sun. The stories of the six persons go on with the movement of the sun and time. On the one hand, the scene of the waves is real and natural. For example:

The waves massed themselves, curved their backs and crashed. Up spurted stones and shingle. They swept round the rocks, and the spray, leaping high, spattered the walls of a cave that had been dry before, and left pools inland, where some fish stranded lashed its tail as the wave drew back.\(^1\)

This is certainly direct description of the nature. We can imagine a beautiful picture in our mind. On the other hand, the novel represents six friends whose reflections create a wave-like atmosphere that is more like a prose poem than to a plot-centered novel. Its form consists of six monologues for each of the six characters in the novel: Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, Bernard, Louis, and Neville. These monologues are broken up by nine sections of short paragraphs detailing a coastal scene at varying stages in a day. Six voices are heard at the same time. They are like molecules juxtaposed in the same wave in every part. And the whole novel consists of nine such waves altogether. This kind of structure is closer to recitative rather than to the simple combination of interior monologues proper. The plot is actually mediated throughout

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\(^1\) Woolf, 1982, P112
by interior confessional monologues. These are in turn framed by opening, inter-chapeted, and closing italicized anonymous narrations which describe the rise, arc and setting of the sun over land and sea during one day.

2. **Symbolism**

Modernist works tend to be more obscure in language style. A lot of objects are applied to metaphor in order to defamiliarize the common images. Symbolist revolution in modern times first occurred in poetry then spreaded to other genres. It made a great change in language. Language is no longer treated as a simple tool of writers, with which they create conforming to the natural and social reality, but as material which has its own laws and forms in the life. The spheres of words thus had been expanded and their multiple meanings explored.

Woolf’s novels are in some sense fictional inheritances from French Symbolist poetry. They are less concerned with telling a story sequentially and more willing to fragment narrative and to chop up experience into small blocks of time, connected through repeated images and symbols rather than exterior events.

The waves can be seen as a symbol of uncertain life and cultural transition. As for this point, I have discussed in detail above. Woolf is particularly fond of the image of waves. We can see the image is used widely in her works. Rhythm pattern of *The Waves* do exist almost in terms of clusters of images and verbal patterns, and these are the central features in their identification and a primary part of their Modernist characteristics. ‘Life comes; life goes’ Indeterminate fluxing ups and downs in life is just the same reflection. The wave is a very important symbol in Woolf’s works. It is not only presented in this novel, but also appears in some her other works. For example:

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1 Woolf, 1982, P118
In the intervals when no one spoke, they heard far off the low murmur of the sea, as the waves quietly broke and spread the beach with a film of water, and withdrew to break again.

On this day indeed Rachel was conscious of what went on round her. She had come to the surface of the dark, sticky pool, and a wave seemed to bear her up and down with it; she had ceased to have any will of her own; she lay on the top of the wave conscious of some pain, but chiefly of weakness. The wave was replaced by the side of a mountain.

Only the next instant to be checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves…on the pale semi-circular beach, wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly a film of mother-of-pearl.

Mrs. Ramsay with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach.

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1 *The Voyage Out* is the first novel by Virginia Woolf published in 1915 by Duckworth; As one of Woolf's Wittiest, socially satirical novels, Rachel Vinrace embarks for South America on her father's ship, and is launched on a course of self-discovery in a modern version of the mythic voyage. P375

2 Virginia Woolf *The Voyage Out*


4 *To the Lighthouse* follows and extends the tradition of modernist novelists where the plot is secondary to philosophical introspection, and the prose can be winding and hard to follow. The novel includes little dialogue and almost no action; most of it is written as thoughts and observations of the major characters. The novel recalls the power of childhood emotions and highlights the impermanence of adult relationships. Compact Books, London, P26
In all her works, the author uses the waves to symbolise a kind of fluxing life, uncertain destination and obscure identity which are the core of her attitude towards the miserable life. The consciousness of the characters are related to the wave movement. They experience fall and rise in their life and emotions. Woolf expressed her pessimistic attitude towards life and death in the uncertain tone. The Waves attempts to scrutinize the moment of vision. The first moment lies in the fourth and fifth sections, during which the group reunites the first time and Percival dies. The second moment lies in the eighth and ninth, during which the group reunites for the second and last time and Rhoda and Bernard die. The two moments are parallel, but their content and imagery contrast. It is in these contrasts that one discovers the true depth of Woolf’s tragic vision. The two moments are just like the two hides in the sea.

The rhythmic rise and fall of phrasing is accord with the rhythm of the waves, and also the rhythm of hand and heart, where life assumes the patterns of a sequence of dreams. Thus the waves are an archetypal symbol of feelings and biological rhythms, of consciousness and life. Virginia Woolf longs for something that is outside existence, some symbol which makes the world of speech less real than the world of silence, or something permanent, even if it is death. This wavelike rhythm, which is the symbolic essence of the book, carries the reader beyond fiction as a sum of contending life-streams into the silence of Being to which lyrical and existential literature aspire.

3. Impressionism and subjectivity.
Modernism emphasizes on personal experiences and individuality. No periods have sung so high praise upon the value of subjectivity as the modern times. Artists have been freed from the social refrain. They become their own self and truly master their language. They can only be responsible for their own speech and no longer care too much about extral world. The tendancy of introvertial writing leads to revolution on the language which is characterised as random, impressive, senssible and fluxing. These are then closely related to impressionism.
Literary Impressionism is not surprisingly, a matter of linguistic techniques, the attempt to make language experiential activity rather than a description of activity. ¹

One of the commonest ways is to weed out particles, conjunctions and so on, the syntactic tools of location and hierarchization. Another method of making language as dynamic as perception is the functional solution, in other words, keeping continuous of the mind with no punctuation mark. ‘Stream of consciousness’ is the result of impressionism in a way. Impressionists usually build up a unified impression of light and meaning by first breaking the subject down to certain meaningful fragments. They focus on sensory perception which abstracts itself by means of infeeling, interrogation, sense of fleetingness.

The novel is full of colour words and descriptive words. So there seems to be always some pictures taken on in front of our eyes when we are reading. The light, the line, the shape, the quality, all in new tides of sensation. All give an abstract atmosphere to the work. The description of the movement of the sun and wave is so lyric and like a modernist painting.

The sun had now sunk lower in the sky. The islands of cloud had gained in density and drew themselves across the sun so that the rocks went suddenly black, and the trembling sea holly lost its blue and turned silver, and shadows were blown like grey cloths over the sea. The waves no longer visited the further pools or reached the dotted black line which lay irregularly upon the beach. The sand was pearl white, smoothed and shining. Birds swooped and circled high up in the air. ²

The clouds, rocks, the waves, the sand...take on all kinds of colours in the sun. All of these consists of a moving picture. We can also sense a strong scepticism of passed life. Everyone is remembering his/her experiences. In their monologues, they select all

² Woolf 1982
the materials from their minds, and then express them out with personal feelings. Here what we can see are six different inner spaces.

Lines and colours persuade me that I too can be herotic.¹

All London is uneasy with flashing lights.²

All for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity.³

The words give us a feeling of strong sense of impression. The characters in the novel remember the old days. What they tell us are from their memory and expressed in a way that is full of their personal emotions. A lot of sensory verbs are used to strengthen the subjectivity, like ‘think’, ‘feel I like’ etc.

We can see in it a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice. This is a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life. Individual value is much emphasized through the whole times. Just look at what Woolf herself said:

The custody of life’s integrities passed from society to individual if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it.⁴

*The Waves* is Virginia Woolf’s most serious and coherent attempt to scrutinize the moment of vision, the novel. The first moment lies in the fourth and fifth sections, during which the group reunites the first time and Percival dies. The second moment

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¹ Woolf 1982, P107
² Woolf 1982, P119
³ Woolf, 1982, P123
lies in the eighth and ninth, during which the group reunites for the second and last time and Rhoda and Bernard die. The two series of moments are parallel, yet their content and imagery contrast. It is in these contrasts that one discovers the true depth of Woolf’s tragic vision.

4. Blurring of genres

Modernist work is always a combination of genres. It breaks through the traditional strict border line between fiction and non-fiction. The language of a novel can be very emotional and lyric, just like poems. A poem can be like a prose or story. In this novel, we can not find exactly the typical characters, the interesting plots, the delicate design of stories. What impress us most are a strong sense of uncertain life and the very beautifully written style. The language of it is lyric and musical. There are also some lines sited from poetry.

   O western wind, when wilt thou blow,
   
   That the small rain down can rain?  

As a matter of fact, since the author uses an experimental style of language, *The Waves* is controversial on its literary genre. Its belonging to novel is always questioned by contemporary theorists. It is said that it cannot satisfy the demands of either important fiction or of important poetry. For example, Louis Kronenberger wrote in *New York Times Book Review* (25 October 1931)

   …the real reason why *The Waves* comes close, as a novel, to going out of bounds is that its true interests are those of poetry. …In spirit, in language, in effect *The Waves* is -- not a poetic novel but a poem, a kind of symphonic poem with themes and thematic development, in prose.

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1 Woolf, 1982, P136
Woolf has reached to a stage that is beyond the psychological reality instead of only passing up superficial reality. She is not really concerned in *The Waves* with people, but is concerned in the prosaic sense with humanity. It is as weak in true perceptiveness as it is rich in sensibility; and even when a character seems to be very skilful in penetration himself, it is actually the essence of a mood that he captures, not a truth. The author does not give us her characters as men and women; she gives them to us clearly as flashing point we can hardly seek to, and in fluxing change they remain throughout the book. . . . They are not six people but six imagist poets, six facets of the imagist poet Woolf herself. Though rare and unique enough, it emerges as minor writing. On an extensive scale she has written imagist novel in a poetic language.

It’s evident that the language and composition of the novel are related to music. The whole nine scenes of the sun and six monologues of characters can be seen as chapters and different levels of voices in a piece of music.

Some argue that Woolf used a musical style as a basis for *The Waves*. Levin Gerald regards a Beethoven fugue as an example of what Woolf attempted when writing the story. Levin explains the fugal style, that a single theme generates motifs heard throughout - in different voices entering the fugue at the different moment and ending in perfect accord¹. Although a single theme is never spoken of in the text, it exists as an idea and has unified theme. The tonalities or six characters each become the thematic center at the moment of expression but are absorbed in to a whole which the novel discloses gradually. The musical style in *The Waves* finely represents the text’s continuous and fluid core.

Woolf’s creation of *The Waves* is similar to the creation of art. Her use of color and light in the novel is similar to that of Monet and the Impressionist artists. I have already talked something about the impressive tone of language. Color is never

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viewed alone but in its relation to or directly as light in most of Monet’s works. Specific passages in *The Waves* in which color is often mentioned in conjunction with light, especially in the interludes. Moreover, the definite shape of characters used in the novel, something one would find in Post Impressionist art, like the works of Van Gogh.

From above, we can definitely call it a prose-like fiction. The novel fuses many elements in modern art and literature.
Conclusion

The Waves, The six characters alternately deliver their "dramatic soliloquies," by which Woolf explores concepts of individuality, self, and the body. Each character is distinct, yet together they compose a gestalt about a silent central consciousness (represented by Percival). Bernard is a story-teller, always seeking some elusive phrase; Louis is an outsider, who seeks acceptance and success; Neville desires love, seeking out a series of men, each of whom become the present object of his transcendent love; Jinny is a socialite, whose value corresponds to her physical beauty; Susan flees the city, in preference for the countryside, where she grapples with the thrills and doubts of motherhood; and Rhoda is riddled with self-doubt and anxiety, always rejecting human compromise, always seeking out solitude. Probably influenced by James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the novel follows its six narrators from childhood through adulthood. The Waves obliterates the traditional distinctions between prose and poetry, allowing the novel to flow between six not dissimilar streams of consciousnesses.

I mainly used Barry’s theory to deal with this problem. I analyzed from the following four points: Firstly, fragmental forms and discontinuous narration.; secondly, the waves as a symbol in the novel. It has profound meanings beyond the natural wave; thirdly, the impression and subjectivity. The monologues of six persons indicate strong stress on the subjectivity; lastly, the blurring of genres. Influenced by modern art, it absorbs many typical impressionist elements. Also Woolf wrote it in a more lyric way than that in a traditional novel.

From the analysis above, I can come to a conclusion that the image of the waves in *The Waves* has rich symbolic meanings and has some relationship with modernism. This book is generally considered as a modernist novel. I think the image of the waves has contributed a lot to its modernist characteristics.
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