



Sounding Religion: Voice and the Power of Music in Virginia Woolf's The Waves.

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Sounding Religion: Voice and the Power of Music in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*.

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf's understanding of music and religion, which is often misapprehended, has not been considered together despite their kindred presence in her work. This study examines the connection between music and religion that Woolf orchestrates through voices in her most innovative novel, *The Waves*, as an attempt to offer a more eclectic approach to apprehend Woolf's aesthetic and religious vision in her writing. A thorough analysis on the author's intentional compositional method of using—silent yet symphonic—voices unveils the religious significance of Woolf's work which she evokes the divine through the power of music as she demonstrates human beings and the world as the work of art as well as the creators of the work of art. By reading, and *listening* to, the symphonic voices, the novel creates a beautiful, unconventional cathedral in one's mind—a sacred space that offers a kind of religious experience to the reader.

Dedication

For Jinny
my beautiful daughter.

For World Peace.

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Introduction

A number of different musical or religious interpretations of *The Waves* have been posited by scholars: The interdisciplinary studies on Woolf and music focus on linking various musical styles or genres to the text (see Clements, Levin, Sutton, Varga, etc.). Other studies suggest the mystical interpretations on her work while considering shifting religious beliefs in the early twentieth century. So far, except a few, including Christopher J. Knight whose analysis is mostly centered on *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's understanding of music and religion have been treated as separate entities in spite of their affinity and prominent presence in Woolf's work. From her first novel where she describes a character's "discomfort" listening to the church service as similar to being "forced to sit through an unsatisfactory piece of music badly played. Tantalized, enraged by the clumsy insensitiveness of the conductor, who put the stress on the wrong places, and annoyed by the vast flock of the audience tamely praising and acquiescing without knowing or caring" (*Voyage Out* 215) to her last novel wherein she sketches a character who is caressing "her cross," "smiling benignly," and "beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance—we reach the conclusion that all is harmony" (*Between the Acts* 175), music and religion often appear together and are inseparable in Woolf's writing, and yet their interconnectedness is surprisingly underexplored.

Considering the modernist aesthetics that encompassed diverse arts and media, a multidisciplinary approach considering both music and religion at the same time in Woolf's writing seems befitting. As Woolf instructs in her "Letter to a Young Poet," "to

find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity,” this thesis finds that voices of *The Waves* invoke music which is inextricably bound with religion (*Essays* 5.316). Therefore, instead of adding another musical interpretation of the text by connecting a specific piece of music to *The Waves* or interpreting religious aspects of the novel based on the text alone, this thesis attempts to bridge a divide between these two existing interdisciplinary fields of studies by asking, and answering, some of the fundamental and deep-seated questions with respect to the novel and the author’s literary experiment: What might have led Woolf to use voices rather than characters? What is the musical and religious significance of using the voices? What do they communicate about Woolf’s spirituality?

In my examinations, I demonstrate the connection between music and religion that Woolf orchestrates through the use of voices in *The Waves*—her most musical, mystical novel, featuring the interior monologues of six friends (Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis) from childhood to their old age (and death) and the italicized interludes, which divide the lives of these friends into nine chapters as well as Percival whose life and death, following the movement of the sun—rising and setting—in the interludes, are described through the voices of his friends. (For our convenience, this thesis refers to the six friends as “characters,” though anomalous.)

Chapter I begins with the brief investigations of the existing studies on Woolf’s music and religion. It presents scholars’ studies and discussions of Woolf’s musical background as well as the significance of music to her life and work prior to moving onto the scholars’ views on religion surrounding Woolf. While examining the influences of her Quaker aunt Caroline Stephen, I observe the link between human beings, music, and

religion in the writings of Stephen and Woolf. By building upon Woolf scholar and theologian Stephanie Paulsell's understanding of the religious importance of Woolf's literature, I examine a scene in *The Waves* in an attempt to clarify the author's method for the novel through which I suggest *listening* for the musical harmonic rhythms in her religious writing. In the next chapter, I delve into Woolf's specific compositional method of using interior monologues—voices—of six characters and the choral voices of the interludes in *The Waves*. The first section of Chapter II explores the voice and its connection to words and music in Woolf's oeuvre. The second section of the chapter analyzes the instrumentalized voices' harmonic functions and the ways in which the voices of the novel create the powerful symphonic composition of life as a whole. Chapter III explores the religious significance of the silent symphonic voices by looking into Woolf's method of connecting music to Woolf's religious vision in her writing. Through an in-depth analysis on Rhoda's quartet scene and two reunion dinner scenes, I demonstrate the sense of divinity Woolf believes in us, human beings, and the world as the work of art as well as the creators of this work of art, the symphonic universe. By conducting a thorough analysis on the presence and the interconnectedness of the voice, music, and religion in *The Waves* along with consulting the existing critical studies on Woolf's life and work, this thesis contends that her most innovative novel of voices creates the sacred space of the oneness by bringing together the myriad voices into a symphonic whole.

Chapter I.

Virginia Woolf's Music and Religion

Since the publications of Virginia Woolf's diaries, essays, and letters, the increased interest in the interdisciplinary study among Woolf scholars to investigate the musicality in her prose has uncovered ample records of Woolf's experience in and knowledge of music as well as the importance of music in her life and work. In contrast to her nephew Quentin Bell's assertion that "She was not, in any strict sense, musical. She played no instrument; I do not think that she could follow a score with any deep comprehension" (149), the recent critical studies on Woolf prove otherwise. For instance, Adriana Varga argues that Woolf "could read music and not only understood musical form and structure but also, most importantly, used them creatively in her own writing" (2). Woolf's letters show that her family bought a pianola in 1902, which she notes, "Really, it is a wonderful machine—beyond a machine in that it lets your own soul flow thro'" (*Letters* 1.57). Although Woolf's father, according to Woolf, had "no ear whatsoever for music," her mother "could play the piano and was musical," and so was her half-sister, Stella Duckworth (*Moments of Being* 114, 86). Her childhood home at Hyde Park Gate also had a piano, and Woolf and her sister, Vanessa, received music (piano and singing) lessons from a young age. Vanessa recalls, "Music naturally, since we were girls, had to be drummed into us, and the piano mistress succeeded in reducing us to complete boredom" (qtd. in Clements 177). A memory from Woolf's childhood shows her early experience as a writer converged with the musical impression, leaving a mark on her:

How excited I used to be when the ‘Hyde Park Gate News’ was laid on her plate on Monday morning, and she [Woolf’s mother] liked something I had written! Never shall I forget my extremity of pleasure—*it was like being a violin and being played upon*—when I found that she had sent a story of mine to Madge Symonds; it was so imaginative, she said; it was about souls flying round and choosing bodies to be born into. (*Moments of Being* 95; emphasis mine)

The extreme sensation conveyed through a musical analogy is quite remarkable (and impactful as her future writings are inundated with music or musical allusions). In addition to being taught music as a child, the records show her continuing involvement with music—through reading, writing, and listening—throughout her life. In 1905, she attends the “weekly concert” at the Queen’s Hall (*A Passionate Apprentice* 257). By 1907, Woolf, confirms Emma Sutton, attends concerts and opera performances in London a few times a week as well as attending public and private subscription concerts regularly to hear chamber music by Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach (8-9). Her brother Adrian Stephen’s diary records Woolf attending staggering number of concerts and opera and ballet performances in London and across Europe in the period of just six weeks in 1909 (Bell 149). Further, in her 1905 review of the fifth volume of *The Oxford History of Music* by W. H. Hadow, Woolf writes,

It may be his attention to the formal side of music which makes Mr Hadow, as it seems to us, understate the immense advance made by Beethoven in musical expression. [. . .] with Beethoven each fresh composition reflects a fresh emotional mood, and the mood in itself gives a new kind of unity to each composition. Especially is this true of the nine great symphonies. (*Essays* 1.374)

Her ability to offer a review on a distinguished music critic’s work, even though it may not be the advanced musicology, as Sutton points out, hints at her confidence and knowledge in music (59). Woolf’s early essay “Street Music” (1905) on street musicians and her two essays, “The Opera” (which appeared in *The Times*, 24 April 1909) and

“Impressions at Bayreuth” (also appeared in *The Times*, 21 August 1909), about Wagner’s music instantiate her preoccupation with music and further signal her knowledge and recognition of the liberating potentials of music in writing. Moreover, the emergence of radio and gramophones, which makes music more easily available to public, impacted Woolf’s musical life by bringing music to her everyday life. The acquisition of a gramophone in 1925—“we have the algraphone, & thats [*sic*] a heavenly prospect—music after dinner while I stitch at my woolwork”—and a “wireless” by 1931—“The wireless is chanting Western European folk songs as I write”—allowed Woolf to immerse herself in music at her home (*Diary* 3.42, *Letters* 4.406). Her husband Leonard remembers Woolf being “very fond of music and [they] used to listen to the wireless and gramophone—classical music—practically every night” (528). Woolf’s diary entries concur with Leonard’s recollection: “I do a little work on it [*The Waves*] in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas” (*Diary* 3.139); “And soon the bell will ring, & we shall dine & then we shall have some music” (*Diary* 3.247); “Black clouds while we played Brahms” (*Diary* 4.241); “Bach at night” (*Diary* 4.336). Besides, Woolf’s relationship with Ethel Smyth, the British female composer of six operas and many chamber and orchestral music, which began in early 1930 during which Woolf was composing *The Waves*, nurtured Woolf’s interest in modernist music in the 1930s. Sutton argues that “the discussion of literary-musical relations was a cornerstone of their relationship,” finding that “Woolf’s most extended commentaries on music [. . .] are in her correspondence with Smyth” (11). The interdisciplinary scholars’ studies and discoveries of music’s prominent presence in Woolf’s writings attest to her knowledge of music and its importance in her life and work. “Statements such as her claim that she

didn't listen like 'musical people' or that she was ill equipped to comment on music are no longer accepted at face value," reasons Sutton, "but recognized as responses to gendered contempt for female music education, dislike of academic music criticism, or reluctance to criticize friends' compositions" (18). A letter to her friend on 4 September 1940 where Woolf discusses the biography of Roger Fry that she had written is a good example.

You have found out exactly what I was trying to do when you compare it to a piece of music. Its [*sic*] odd, for I'm not regularly musical, but *I always think of my books as music before I write them*. And especially with the life of Roger,—there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into *themes*. I did try to state them in the first chapter, and then to bring in *developments* and *variations*, and then to *make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter*. Just as you say, I am extraordinarily pleased that you felt this. No one else has I think. And I don't [*sic*] wonder, for I was often crushed under the myriad details. (*Letters* 6.426; emphasis mine)

Although she states, "I'm not regularly musical," her confession that she thinks of her books as music as well as incorporating the musical elements ("themes," "developments," "variations," and the recapitulation of "bringing back the first theme in the last chapter") into Roger Fry's biography is an affirmation of her musical knowledge. It also demonstrates her understanding of the deep connection between music and literature: Thinking of "a piece of music" to hold "such a mass of detail" or "the myriad details" (in addition to "mak[ing] them all heard together") illuminates her writing method, especially in *The Waves*, the novel that brings a myriad of voices together.

Similar to literary scholars' interpretations, what is no longer accepted at face value is her statements towards religion. Woolf's outwardly dismissive remarks toward religion call to mind her agnostic parents. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsey, who is

modelled after Woolf's father, is portrayed as if saying, "There is no God" (207). Mrs. Ramsey, channeling Woolf's mother, is annoyed with herself for saying, "We are in the hands of the Lord," for she believes that "she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean" (63). Woolf's mother Julia, who lost her faith after the death of her beloved first husband, was already an agnostic, notes Stephanie Paulsell, when she came across the essays of Woolf's father Leslie Stephen ("Family Resemblances" 91). Leslie, one of the leading agnostic philosophers of his time, left Cambridge University where he was ordained as a clergyman, after losing his faith. Although it seems as though Woolf shared her parents' agnosticism, her frequent employment of religious language in her writing counterpoises the anti-religious voices (e.g., Louis and Neville in *The Waves*; Lucy and Bartholomew in *Between the Acts*) as Christopher J. Knight points out (30). Knight recognizes the pervading presence of the (Christian) religion in her fictional works—"in the form of church buildings, clerical lives, faith-identified characters, scriptural allusions, sacred music and so forth"—and argues that "however detached Woolf might have become regarding the Church as institution, it still survives as a very significant vestigial force in her fiction" (33-34).

Rather than clothing her solely with the influence of the agnostic parents, recent studies on religion surrounding Woolf observe the profound influences of her family's religious dynamic—in particular, her Quaker aunt—that shaped Woolf's life and work. Paulsell states that Woolf shared with her evangelical Christian grandfather James Stephen, her agnostic father, and her Quaker paternal aunt Caroline Stephen "a revulsion toward too-easy religious answers to the profound questions of life" (*Religion* 43). Paulsell recognizes the strong resonances between "the language, imagery and ideas that

permeate her [aunt's] work and that of the work of Virginia Woolf,” and notes that Woolf’s religious views bear a closer resemblance to her Quaker aunt’s “fluid, undogmatic view” than that of her agnostic father and Christian grandfather (“Family Resemblances” 95, 96). In *Reflections*, Kathleen A. Heininge, who also closely examines Woolf’s spirituality in light of her aunt Stephen’s Quaker belief and influence, explores the affinity between Woolf’s mysticism and the qualities of Quaker belief. While recognizing the difference between rejection of the church and rejection of God, Heininge argues that Woolf “does not wholly reject the Divine” (2) and that the individual’s silent communion—as opposed to language or the mediated voices of male clergy—with the Divine that Quakerism embodies becomes powerful for Woolf (123-24). These scholars mark the importance of the Quaker meetings Woolf attended with her aunt as the silent communion of the characters often emerges in her novels; however, what is underdiscussed, despite of its gravity, for Woolf, is her aunt’s rumination on human beings concerning divine. Stephen (and Woolf), contends Paulsell, considers human beings as part of the work of art when she writes, “I don’t think we can perhaps ever tell where the divine begins and the human ends; indeed I don’t think it is like that, as who should say one province was human and another divine? To me it seems as if the human were but a note *in* the divine harmony, a syllable *in* the divine poem” (qtd. in *Religion* 47). Paulsell concludes that Stephen writes the “work of art as divine in origin,” whereas Woolf’s work of art is insisted on “what is real” (*Religion* 47). Yet it is noteworthy that Stephen’s contemplation of the human as “a note in the divine harmony,” in particular, conveys the human beings’ connection to music and religion (as well as the proximity of music and religion). This inextricable link between human beings, music,

and religion, which is surprisingly rarely discussed by the scholars, is reflected in Woolf's writings and above all in *The Waves*, wherein she connects human beings closer to divine than Paulsell grants through music.

In a review that appeared shortly after *The Waves*' publication, V. S. Pritchett writes of a "profound impression" the book made "as if a Bach fugue had built a cathedral in [his] head" (qtd. in Sutton 16). One of the ways Woolf engaged with religion was by "creating a literature that did, and continues to do, a kind of religious work," writes Paulsell (*Religion* 5). *The Waves* did "a kind of religious work" to the readers then, as the early reviewer Pritchett sensed, and it still does. Woolf herself seems to acknowledge the importance of her writing when she writes, "I feel that by writing I am doing what is far more necessary than anything else" (*Moments of Being* 73). Woolf creates a work with sacred significance in the modern world where "Science and religion have between them destroyed belief" (*Essays* 4.429). Her initial desire for *The Waves* was to write "something mystic, spiritual," "the very serious, mystical poetical work," but the finished result of her experimental writing, the spiritual (and aural) experience the novel creates in the reader, as Pritchett noted in his review, goes far beyond the realm of poetry (*Diary* 3.114, 131). Paulsell argues that Woolf's desire for, and experiment with, a new prose form can be traced back to Matthew Arnold who asserts in "The Study of Poetry" (1880) that poetry would replace religion "because, having attached itself to facts which failed in the face of modern science, religion could no longer do the work of interpreting, consoling or sustaining" (*Family Resemblances* 86-87). "Just as Arnold argued that poetry must replace religion," claims Paulsell, "Woolf argued that poetry

could no longer ‘serve us as it has served so many generations of our fathers’” (*Family Resemblances* 87). In “The Narrow Bridge of Art,” Woolf discusses,

the failure of poetry to serve us as it has served so many generations of our fathers. Poetry is not lending her services to us nearly as freely as she did to them. The great channel of expression which has carried away so much energy, so much genius, seems to have narrowed itself or to have turned aside. (*Essays* 4.429; emphasis mine)

Although Paulsell’s consideration does not extend deeper into the musical import in Woolf’s work, recognizing that Woolf “saw the need to go beyond poetry into new forms of prose that would do poetry’s—and thus religion’s—work” renders a valuable insight in Woolf’s writing (*Religion* 12).

Considering this religious significance of her writing, one scene in particular in *The Waves* throws light upon the complexity of the author’s method for the novel. The soliloquy of Louis at the eating-house is often recognized for its rhythmic language; but is that all? Louis’ statement, “If this is all, this is worthless,” implores one to seek his (and Woolf’s) meaning and look deeper into the scene (93). At the eating-house, Louis tries to read a book of poetry: “I prop my book against a bottle of Worcester sauce and try to look like the rest. Yet I cannot. (They go on passing, they go on passing in disorderly procession.) I cannot read my book, or order my beef, with conviction” (93). When Louis says, “Yet I cannot,” it could mean either he cannot look like the rest or he cannot read his book of poetry, but it seems more likely that his frustration applies to both as his subsequent sentence indicates (“I cannot read my book, or order my beef, with conviction”). While he is trying to read, the rhythm of the eating-house (“They go on passing, they go on passing [. . .]”) interferes as clearly noted in the form of a parenthesis, which is interjected in the middle of his soliloquy. The poetry and the rhythm of the

eating-house are knitted together in his thoughts. Within this context, the following often-quoted passage must be examined in greater detail:

All excesses beyond that norm are vanity. That is the mean; that is the average. Meanwhile the hats bob up and down; the door perpetually shuts and opens. I am conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair. If this is all, this is worthless. Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. The average men, including her rhythm in their rhythm ('I would take a tenner; for it blocks up the hall') take their greens, take their apricots and custard. Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. (93-94)

Louis notes the rhythm of the hats bobbing up and down, the door shutting and opening, and the waitresses swinging in and out, round and round, resembling a rhythm of a waltz tune. The scene seems to describe the rhythm of eating-house on the surface; however, as shown earlier, his equivocal remarks make it unclear whether Louis is thinking about the eating-house or poetry or both. What Louis says about the people who are dining, "All excesses beyond that norm are vanity," recalls Woolf's own words in her early essay: "Rhythm alone might easily lead to excesses" (*Essays* 1.31). In "Street Music," she advises modern writers to "invent—or rather remember—the innumerable metres [. . .] which would restore both prose and poetry to the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed" (*Essays* 1.31). Of the book that he is trying to read, Louis notices that

It contains some forged rings, some perfect statements, a few words, but poetry. You, all of you, ignore it. What the dead poet said, you have forgotten. And I cannot translate it to you so that its binding power ropes you in, and makes it clear to you that you are aimless; and the rhythm is cheap and worthless. (94-95)

The unbroken circle and the complete harmony Louis notices in the waltz-like rhythm of the eating-house echo the "forged rings, some perfect statements" that he finds in the

book of poetry in front of him. In fact, Louis describes himself as “the companion of Plato, of Virgil,” and his thoughts trace his roots and the past (“remembering all this”) as if remembering the “ancient” meters and harmonies, as Woolf writes in her essay (95, 96). His statement, “You, all of you, ignore it,” is directed to both the people at the eating-house and the writer of the “aimless” poetry and of “the words that trail drearily without human meaning” (95). In the same sense, the “cheap and worthless” rhythm does not simply apply to the rhythm of the eating-house only, but more towards the rhythm of poetry. Like the repetitive beat of the waltz tune, the repetitive meter of poetry is not something Woolf tries to emulate in her writing. What she writes about the rhythm of the waltz in *The Years* bespeaks the poetry made up with repetitive rhythms: “as it [waltz music] repeated the same rhythm again and again, it coarsened them, it destroyed them. The dance music interfered with everything. At first exciting, then it became boring and finally intolerable” (129). Furthermore, the examination of another parenthesis (“I would take a tenner; for it blocks up the hall”) that appears in Louis’ soliloquy further clarifies the scene that captures the concurrence of the rhythm of eating-house and of poetry. The men’s dialogue of discussing the sale of a piano is inserted in the sentence that describes the inclusion of the rhythm of women (waitresses): “men, including *her* rhythm in *their* rhythm.” By strategically placing their dialogue right before Louis asks, “Where then is the *break* in this continuity? What the *fissure* through which one sees disaster?,” this parenthetical “break” or “fissure” works as a means to offer a glimpse of the other (disastrous) side of the reality. Sutton views the piano that “blocks up the hall” as an “obstructive litter from an earlier era” (65). Women were taught to play the piano to entertain family and guests, but, writes Woolf, were “not allowed to join an orchestra”

(*Three Guineas* 45). Although women (waitresses) are still serving men, selling this “obstructive litter” signals cultural shifts—and changing beliefs and attitudes towards religion—in the early twentieth century. Not only does it indicate the practice of enjoying music that has changed (with the invention of gramophone and radio), removing piano that does not serve its purpose, but rather becomes obstructive, implies Woolf’s contention that poetry is no longer serving its function. Therefore, even though the rhythm seems to be stressed in the eating-house scene—and in the novel, as Bernard says, “the rhythm is the main thing in writing” (79), and as Woolf says, “I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot” (*Diary* 3.316)—, the reason for disparaging the rhythm as worthless in this scene has less to do with the value of the rhythm in her writing, but has more to do with poetry and its role as “a substitute for religion,” which is consistent with Paulsell’s assertion that Woolf was reaching for something beyond poetry as she believed that poetry could no longer serve us as it used to (*Family Resemblances* 87). Instead of excessive (poetic) rhythms, Woolf emphasizes the rhythm that is united with “tune and harmony” in her aforementioned essay (*Essays* 1.31). As Woolf herself remembers (just as Louis remembers) “the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed,” she envisions,

the echo of rhythmic harmony, which for the moment makes of life a united and musical whole; and it seems probable considering this that there is a music in the air for which we are always straining *our ears* and which is only partially made audible to us by the transcripts which the great musicians are able to preserve. In forests and solitary places *an attentive ear* can detect something very like a vast pulsation, and *if our ears were educated* we might hear the music also which accompanies this. [. . .] If, therefore, instead of libraries, philanthropists would bestow free music upon the poor, so that at each street corner the melodies of Beethoven and Brahms and Mozart could be heard, it is probable that all crime and quarrelling would soon be unknown, and the work of the hand and the thoughts of the mind would flow melodiously in obedience to the

laws of music. It would then be a crime to account street musicians or any one who interprets the voice of the god as other than a holy man, and our lives would pass from dawn to sunset to the sound of music. (*Essays* 1.31-32; emphasis mine)

The author, for whom her writing “is far more necessary than anything else,” implores *our ears* to listen to the echo of the rhythmic harmonic moments of life in her work; it is not a mere coincidence that the characters of *The Waves* ask of each other (and ultimately of the reader) to “Listen” throughout the novel as the tune and harmony of their voices create rhythms in the words. In the next two chapters, the nexus between music and religion will be considered and explored in a novel where the lives of the characters “pass from dawn to sunset to the sound of music.” Like “the transcripts” of “the great musicians” who make the music of life audible to us, the aural and musical qualities of Woolf’s writing will be closely examined in an effort to hear and better understand her ways of creating the “united and musical whole” in a kind of religious novel.

Chapter II.

Voice and Music

The Waves is composed of interior monologues—voices—of six characters rather than a traditional method of narration and the mysterious interludes that appear intermittently. Yet, the underlying question of what might have led the author to use voices rather than characters is undoubtedly underexplored. Studying the author's intentional use of voices is crucial in understanding the experiment Woolf undertook and her aesthetic—and religious—vision in writing. This chapter explores several of Woolf's own writings, which point to her aspiration of creating a novel of silent symphony, while examining the voices' engagement in *The Waves*.

Voices

The Waves is a novel of voices. Woolf's diary entry of 23 June 1929 reveals the author's idea for the novel beginning with “*voices* of cock & nightingale; & then all the children at a long table” (*Diary* 3.236; emphasis mine). When reviews appeared after the publication of *The Waves*, Woolf writes in her diary on 8 October 1931: “Odd, that they [*The Times*] shd. praise my characters when I meant to have none” (*Diary* 4.47). Cristine Froula recognizes the significance of this comment and notes the “mixed chorus, the six *I*'s—not characters but voices, translucent to being and to each other—who soliloquize one by one” (201; emphasis in original). Woolf's intention to not have characters, but instead, to use voices in this novel recalls one of her earlier essays. In “On Not Knowing Greek,” she discusses the beauty of the choruses of Greek drama and adds,

It is this that the choruses supply; the old men or women who take no active part in the drama, the undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind; who can comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to this conception. Always in imaginative literature, where characters speak for themselves and the author has no part, the need of that voice is making itself felt. (*Essays* 4.43)

As with the Greek choruses, “the undifferentiated voices” of *The Waves*’ interludes—nature and human, including the woman raising a lamp in the first interlude—seem to serve as the chorus. At the same time, the voices of the six characters speak (or sing like birds) for themselves or comment or sum up, like Bernard who tries to “sum up” the meaning of his life (238). Although the voices of the interludes appear to “take no active part” in the story, each interlude sets the mood for the section that immediately follows—each stage of the six characters’ lives. A description of the birds, for instance, whose “chorus” is “*shrill and sharp*” with “[f]ear” and “*apprehension of pain*” in the third interlude, that are competitive and violent as “*they chased each other, escaping, pursuing, pecking each other,*” foreshadows the savage thoughts and discords of some of the characters in the following section (73, 74): Shortly after Bernard, who felt Neville’s “disapproval,” criticizes the “remorseless honesty of [his] intellect,” Neville in return criticizes Bernard by saying, “Once you were Tolstoi’s young man; now you are Byron’s young man; perhaps you will be Meredith’s young man” (84, 85, 87). The “aural interludes” also, according to Elicia Clements, “frame and bridge the movements of the larger inter-chapters, surrounding the soliloquies with musicalized language” (168). Furthermore, the chorus of nature in the interludes brings the reader out of the characters’ story and reminds us of the temporal nature of men’s existence in relation to time: each interlude is a constant reminder of fleeting human existence when compared with the

immensity of natural time; thus the chorus, though not active, asserts itself throughout the novel. Besides the wave-like oscillation of the interludes in between the stages of the characters' lives, the novel is filled with the sounds of singing and choruses—voice “making itself felt” as Woolf puts it.

[T]here was a distant cheering, the sound of singing, as if people waved their hats and joined in some last song. The sound of the chorus came across the water and I felt leap up that old impulse, which has moved me all my life, to be thrown up and down on the roar of other people's voices, singing the same song; to be tossed up and down on the roar of almost senseless merriment, sentiment, triumph, desire. (278-79)

The sound of the chorus (“voices, singing the same song”), which has moved Bernard all his life, resembles “the falling wave which has sounded all [his] life” (291). The “incessant rise and fall and fall and rise” of the wave is sounded and is heard throughout the novel like a voice “making itself felt,” like music (297). In an analysis of the effect of the voice in *The Waves*, Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen notes the wave acting as “both a theme and a structure” in the novel as well as “the figure that ties the components of the novel together through rhythm” (126). The perpetual rhythmic motion of the wave and the forces of roaring voices in the novel not only capture the essence of life, but also convey the meaning of life better than the words alone can express. Clearly, the voices of *The Waves* kindle music in a way that distinguishes this novel from Woolf's other works as well as other modernist novels.

Woolf's musings on the intimacy between writing and music throughout her writing career offer further insights on her use of voices in *The Waves*. In her 1905 essay, “Street Music,” Woolf writes, “[T]he art of writing, which is nearly allied to the art of music, [. . .] is chiefly degenerate because it has forgotten its allegiance [to music]” (*Essays* 1.31). Stressing the importance of music in writing even in this early essay,

Woolf signals her understanding of (and her future new form of) writing. Music becomes a powerful avenue for Woolf in the articulation of her new innovative form of—modernist—writing (Sutton 49). In Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out*, the protagonist Rachel Vinrace says, “[M]usic goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once. With writing it seems to me there’s so much [. . .] scratching on the match-box” (195-96). Rachel’s fiancé, Terence Hewet, on the other hand, wishes to create a novel “about Silence [. . .] the things people don’t say” (204). The two characters appear to be coupled with different forms of art—Rachel with music and Terence with writing—however, besides the fact that they are engaged to be married, it is hard to overlook the connection Woolf is making between music and writing when Terence says, “What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano [. . .] We want to find out what’s behind things, don’t we?” (206-7). In a sense, Woolf seems to value both music and writing—in spite of their differences—for their intermedial approach to convey human experience and inner life. In an article that examines the functions of language in *The Voyage Out*, E. L. Bishop states that Woolf succeeds in bringing “language to the flash point, effecting a swift illumination which, like music, says many things at once” (358-59). Bishop asserts that Terence’s cry, shouting “Rachel! Rachel!” (334) outside of the room where she dies, becomes “a channel for feeling” as the word/cry, previously “a person’s Christian name,” captures the moment of his loss and brings the meaning to the readers better than his spoken words—“No one has ever loved as we have loved” (334): thus the art (Woolf’s writing) can say “all there is to say at once” as Rachel says of music (356-57). This crucial observation Bishop makes here

connects the (in)ability of language with musical qualities, which Bernard reverberates in *The Waves*:

We have no ceremonies, only private dirges and no conclusions, only violent sensations, each separate. Nothing that has been said meets our case. (157)

[W]hat is the use of painfully elaborating these consecutive sentences when what one needs is nothing consecutive but a bark, a groan? (251)

[W]e need not whip this prose into poetry. The little language is enough. (263)

But for pain words are lacking. There should be cries, cracks, fissures, whiteness passing over chintz covers . . . (263)

By what name are we to call death? I do not know. I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry [. . .] I need no words. Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. None of those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts making wild music, false phrases. I have done with phrases. (295)

Bishop's so-called "swift illumination" is accessible through a cry or "a little language,"

Bernard seems to say, but his painstakingly repeated statements also emphasize the limitation of words to capture and express the ineffable. In *The Voyage Out*, as Bishop proves, Woolf explores with the word of a cry that communicates the meaning to the readers as music can; however, the novel is still filled with so much of "scratching on the match-box" to reach that zenith. Too, in *The Waves*, although "a bark, a groan," "howl," or "a cry" may be all one needs in moments of despair, loss, love, or ecstasy, Bernard nonetheless has to use words to make his point. Bernard's struggle, on one hand, relates to the words ("Nothing that has been said meets our case"; "words are lacking"; "I have done with phrases"), which are the means of his expression, that are constricted within

the realm of language. On the other hand, Bernard's repeated cries unveil the words resounding with the complex emotion. Even though the emotion is never directly stated, the readers are swept up by the strong current of the emotion and by the beauty of the words resonating through internal voices. What Woolf is doing in *The Waves* is unmistakably similar to the work of Thomas De Quincey that she perceives and discusses in her 1932 essay "De Quincey's Autobiography." While praising the passages in his autobiographic sketches, Woolf writes,

It does not wish to argue or to convert or even to tell a story. We can draw all our pleasure from the words themselves. [. . .] If we try to analyse our sensations we shall find that we are worked upon as if by music – the senses are stirred rather than the brain. The rise and fall of the sentence immediately soothes us to a mood and removes us to a distance in which the near fades and detail is extinguished. Our minds, thus widened and lulled to a width of apprehension, stand open to receive one by one in slow and stately procession the ideas which De Quincey wishes us to receive; [. . .] The theme is supported and amplified and varied. The idea of hurry and trepidation, of reaching towards something that for ever flies, intensifies the impression of stillness and eternity. Bells heard on summer evenings, palm-trees waving, sad winds that blow for ever, keep us by successive waves of emotion in the same mood. The emotion is never stated; it is suggested and brought slowly by repeated images before us until it stays, in all its complexity, complete. (*Essays* 5.453)

Woolf's meditation of De Quincey's passages in this essay, which was published a year after she wrote *The Waves*, seems to fit the description of her own novel so precisely so that one can almost replace the name "De Quincey" with "Woolf" in the passage above. *The Waves* "does not wish to argue or to convert or even to tell a story," like the writing of De Quincey: Bernard tells so many stories in the novel, but at the same time, he avows that "none of them are true" (238). Woolf, who wrote two other essays on De Quincey previously ("The English Mail-Coach" in 1906 and "Impassioned Prose" in 1926), appears to be inspired by the musicality of De Quincey's writing. Roxanne Covelo who

examines Woolf's approach to De Quincey's work also finds Woolf praising "the sensual, musical quality of [De Quincey's] writing" (33). As Woolf says, our "senses are stirred" by the voices that "rise and fall" with "successive waves of emotion" like music in *The Waves*: "the theme is supported and amplified and varied" by the musical qualities (and that of voices) in "the words themselves" that capture and communicate inner life without "scratching on the match-box" so much. Despite her earlier comment of "how little words can do to render music" (*Essays* 1.291), Woolf, argues Sutton, was "acutely aware of the limitations as well as the potential of intermedial analogies and of words' (in)ability to represent or evoke music" (14). In discussing a new form of writing that has "something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose," Woolf hints that she will "dramatize some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist-*the power of music*" (*Essays* 4.435, 439; emphasis mine). Interestingly, in an article that discusses music in Woolf's writing, Clements claims that, from *The Waves* onward, "Woolf deliberately attempts to reconstitute novelistic methods by looking to the 'classical' tradition of music as a potential model" (160). Writing a novel that is comprised of interior voices with musical qualities, therefore, seems to be purposeful—to dramatize "the power of music."

The sketches of voices in her earlier writing, which provide the groundwork for her experimentation that employs silent voices for the entire novel in *The Waves*, extend and challenge our notion about voice and music. The "voices" of Rachel and Terence, in *The Voyage Out*, when they speak of love for each other, are described as "tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words" (257). Their combined voices are like "a little language such as lovers use," as Bernard puts it, and their complex emotion is

epitomized in musical words like “tones” and “sound” rather than being explicit. The wordless voices reappear a few years later in a short story, “Kew Gardens.” The human voices are described as “Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices” (97). At the same time, nature and city noises enact the voices of the summer day: the sound of an aeroplane becomes “the voice of the summer sky murmur[ing] its fierce soul”; the movements of the thrush that hops “with long pauses between one movement and the next” and the white butterflies that “dance[s] one above another” instead of “rambling” are described as if to mark some musical notes; the motor omnibuses are “turning their wheels and changing their gear [...] on the top of which the voices cried aloud” (96-97). The voices of “men, women, and children” are layered with the voices in and surrounding the garden, creating a musical effect (97). As an aeroplane, advertising for toffee, flies in the June sky in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the sound of the plane “making letters in the sky” draws a variety of characters’ attention (20). In this moment, as the characters gaze up, trying to spell out the letters in the sky, the act of looking together at the same object creates an “extraordinary silence and peace” (21) and a sense of unity—like “looking together united” the characters as their eyes gazed at the dish of fruit at the dinner table in *To the Lighthouse* (97) and similarly explored in dinner scenes in *The Waves*—and the sense of linear time disappears. Further, the aeroplane scene seems to deliberately capture the audible voices (speeches) of individuals prior to focusing on the interior monologues that are intermingled with the characters’ audible voices. First, the voices of Mrs. Coates, Mrs. Bletchley, and Mr. Bowley are noted with the words like “said” and “murmured” (20-21). The actual words spoken by the characters are very little, and the narrator, instead, describes the sounds of non-human voices in detail: “an aeroplane”; “a flight of

gulls” crossing the sky; “bells” striking eleven times (20, 21). Once the narrator moves to describe the inner voices of the characters, the thoughts—noted with repeated use of the word “thought” (21, 23, 26, 27, 28)—of Septimus, Rezia, Maisie Johnson, Mrs. Dempster, Mr. Bentley, and finally “a nondescript man carrying a leather bag” are intermingled with brief speech (28). Unlike the former (the spoken words), the interior monologues of the characters illustrate their struggles and illuminate the ability of the words to vivify the inner life in writing much better than the audible voices. But, as Septimus notes, “Interrupted again!” (25), talking voices—and the traditional linear narration—interrupt and limit this ability of the words’ expression. Like the words of the aeroplane that appear and disappear in the sky, the portrayal of the fragmented words of audible voices and the interruption of inner thoughts paints the use of silent voices—interior monologues that allow inner thoughts (and “the things people don’t say,” which Terence alludes in *The Voyage Out*) to be expressed more freely without interruption—as more appealing as a narrative technique. While Woolf finds the voices of human (and nature) to be musical and magical, her attraction to, and awareness of, the sounds and the echoes silent voices can create in one’s heart is more apparent as in the following scene. As Septimus hears the nursemaid spelling the letters written by the plane, he marvels that “the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions [. . .] can quicken trees into life!” (22). The human voice, sending “waves of sound” into his brain, along with “the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave” creates rhythm (22). The musical effect of the voices of human and nature are further heightened, but it gets interrupted, ironically, by a human voice.

The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—
“Septimus!” said Rezia. (22-23)

The narrative moves to Rezia without finishing its sentence: the em dash after “the birth of a new religion,” like Woolf’s frequent use of ellipsis, allows the narrative to avoid rendering the meaning (of this new religion), but also the silencing of this thought by the audible voice illustrates the limitations of the traditional narrative style in novels. The sound of human voices, as Bernard says, “The human voice has a disarming quality—(we are not single, we are one)” (68), can be powerful, and yet, for Woolf, talking voices appear to represent the interruption of thoughts and the challenge of capturing mystic experience in contrast to silence: “Will truth be quicker found because we stop our ears to music [. . .] instead of talking?” (*Essays* 4.47); “What was the use of talking, talking, merely talking?” (*The Voyage Out* 207); “Speech is false” and “Hence the silence, the sublimity” (*The Waves* 138, 157). Hence, the comment Susan makes in *The Waves* is quite startling, and yet, considering Woolf’s stance on talking voices, it further hints why the author resorted to the “silent voices” in her novel: “This talking is undressing an old woman whose dress had seemed to be part of her, but now, as we talk, she turns pinkish underneath, and has wrinkled thighs and sagging breasts. When you are silent you are again beautiful” (131). Here, talking is linked with the undressing of an old woman while the silence is perceived as beauty. The ugliness is aimed at the undressing (talking) rather than the old woman. This stark contrast illustrates what was then presented as questions in Woolf’s earlier novel. “Aren’t things spoilt [. . .] by saying them?,” asks Lily Briscoe. While noting the *silent* presence of Mrs. Ramsey, she wonders, “Aren’t we more

expressive thus?” (*To the Lighthouse* 171-72). Woolf’s use of silent voices thus not only allows her to overcome the challenges of talking voices (dialogues) in a traditional narrative method, but also empowers her to express things without having to utter the meaning, like music.

A Symphony of Voices

The opening passage of the six characters in *The Waves* appears as the sounds of innocent children, and yet the voices of the characters that describe the visible and aural images of the surroundings are extremely musical, prefiguring the symphonic novel.

- [1] “I see a ring,” said Bernard, “hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.”
- [2] “I see a slab of pale yellow,” said Susan, “spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.”
- [3] “I hear a sound,” said Rhoda, “cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.”
- [1] “I see a globe,” said Neville, “hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.”
- [2] “I see a crimson tassel,” said Jinny, “twisted with gold threads.”
- [3] “I hear something stamping,” said Louis. “A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.” (9; emphasis mine)

The children’s short phrases render an effect of gradually emerging sounds along with a pattern of musical notes: one-two-three, and one-two-three, as noted above. The voices assemble themselves into melodies, in a similar way, becoming resonant and complex as their monologues progress. Moreover, like this opening passage, the voices of two or more characters often appear together—Bernard and Susan both say “I see,” Neville and Jinny also repeat “I see,” and Rhoda and Louis say “I hear”—throughout the novel. The paired voices of the characters, similar to paired instruments in orchestral music, counter or complement each other’s voice, creating rhythm and a layered sound effect. The section above highlights the rhythms and musicality of prose—aided by the use of

alliterations (e.g., words begin with “s,” “h,” or “l”), assonance (e.g., “a,” “ee,” “ea,” “ai,” or “oo” sounds in words), consonance (e.g., words with “ng,” “ch,” “d,” “p,” “l,” “s,” “m,” or “t”), anaphora (e.g., repeating phrases like “I see” and “I hear”), and onomatopoeia (e.g., “cheep, chirp”), to name a few—that the six characters’ opening voices create. The mosaic colors noted on the first six voices (if the sounds of the words had colors) bear resemblance to elaborate orchestral scores. Considering Woolf’s letter of 1906, where she asks, “do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?,” it is not surprising to find more words that refer to shape, color, texture, and movement than sound in the passage (*Letters* 1.264). The words that refer to sound (“cheep, chirp” and “stamps”) as well as shape (“ring,” “loop,” “slab,” “stripe,” “globe,” and “drop”), color (“pale yellow,” “purple,” “crimson,” and “gold”), texture (“tassel,” “threads,” and “chained”), and movement (“quivers,” “hanging,” “spreading away,” “going up and down,” “drop,” “twisted,” and “stamping”) inspire and stimulate musical sensations. In her earlier essay of 1909, Woolf also writes, “here at Bayreuth, where the music fades into the open air, and we wander with *Parsifal* in our heads through empty streets at night, [. . .] and sound melts into colour, and colour calls out for words” (*Essays* 1.292). The intricate connection between music and words that traverses sound, color, and other forms is embraced throughout *The Waves*. Bernard, for example, says,

The bell is pressed and I do not ring or give out irrelevant clamours all jangled. I am titillated inordinately by some splendour; the ruffled crimson against the green lining; the march of pillars; the orange light behind the black, pricked ears of the olive trees. Arrows of sensation strike from my spine, but without order. (157)

Shortly after these words, Bernard adds “something is added to my interpretation.

Something lies deeply buried. For one moment I thought to grasp it” (157). This brief

moment of experience, which he later calls “exaltation” (264), takes place at a gallery. The metaphoric sound of the bell, which embodies the state of Bernard, in his head—similar to Woolf’s experience of wandering with *Parsifal* in her head—melts into color (and shape and texture) and then calls for words. Comparing the first voice of the characters with his later soliloquy further aids in deciphering the sound qualities and musical effects of the voices for the entire novel Woolf had in mind: “I see a *ring*,” said Bernard, “hanging above me. It *quivers* and hangs in a *loop of light*.” Later in his life, Bernard notes, “The shock of the falling wave which has sounded all my life, which woke me so that I saw the *gold loop* on the cupboard, no longer makes *quiver* what I hold” (291; emphasis mine). The young Bernard is woken up by the sound of the falling wave, and he sees “the gold loop on the cupboard,” created perhaps by the light, which he expresses in a child’s voice as a “ring” that “quivers and hangs in a loop of light.” The sound of the waves that he hears melts into shape, color, and movement (“loop of light”; “quivers and hangs”). In the same way, the words that are used to describe the sounds in the passage and the novel create rhythms, and at the same time, they also mimic the sound of music—for instance, “stamping” renders the sound of steady drumbeats or waves crashing: The voices of the characters not only describe the sound they hear around them, but the voices themselves are also presented as musical instruments, (re)creating musical effects.

Bernard’s famous simile in the last chapter of the novel reveals the heart of Woolf’s own experiment—how voices create the power of music in *The Waves*. When he acknowledges the difficulty of capturing life with phrases, he exclaims,

How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole—again like music. What a symphony, with its

concord and its discord and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. (256)

As Bernard notes, it is indeed impossible to “detach one separately” in the apprehension of this symphonic novel. The six characters’ interior voices together “give the effect of the whole.” Like symphonic music, their instrumentalized voices with “concord” and “discord” contribute to create the sound of the whole. Each character with its distinct voice can be heard, and yet the complex contrapuntal voices of six characters allow the author and the readers access to the fullness in expression. This compositional technique recalls her desire of writing “four lines at a time, [. . .] as a musician does; because it always seems to me that things are going on at so many different levels simultaneously” (*Letters* 5.315). When an allusion to a “symphony” first appears in Woolf’s earlier novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsey, raising and lowering his right arm, is described “as if he were conducting some secret symphony” when he and his children finally reach the lighthouse (188). Whereas *To the Lighthouse* captures the harmonic moment through the symphonic gesture, *The Waves* delineates the intricacy of life through symphonic voices that evince the “tunes” of both high and low. Instead of one pictorial image capturing the moment, the harmony in *The Waves* is being created by the various tunes of the characters and their surroundings that mark the changing and evolving lives—their voices offering multiple perspectives on their shared moments. Understanding the “symphony” of *The Waves* that (re)presents the independent yet interdependent voices of characters echoing consonance and dissonance throughout the novel becomes essential to experience the power of music orchestrated in Woolf’s experimental novel.

Some of the critics' interpretations of the musicality of *The Waves*, however, seem to misapprehend the author's effort despite the clear reference to a symphony in the text. In particular, Clements, who perceives Woolf's understanding of music and literature "as socially constructed cultural artifacts," approaches each character with different types of movement (e.g., Neville with the first movement of Opus 130; Louis with the second and Susan with the third movement, etc.), especially with Beethoven's late quartets (161). Gerald Levin also connects the novel to Beethoven's late quartets, suggesting that Woolf was thinking about the musical structure of *The Waves* as "a thematic device and not as a 'musical' rendering of sensuous experience" (165). Levin argues that the "unity is achieved in the consciousness of Bernard only" and that the "unity of experience to which each character contributes is [. . .] never merging or blending" (169). Although the discussions of Clements and Levin offer interesting perspectives on music in Woolf's novel, approaching each character as articulating different types of movement or treating the contribution of each voice—and experience of each character—as a separate phenomenon are contrary to Woolf's understanding of the power of music. With each voice representing a different type of instrument (metaphorically speaking), their collective voices create a powerful symphony that renders a musical sensuous experience. Besides the fact that the orchestral instruments such as the "fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum" belong to symphonies rather than quartets, Bernard's simile to a symphony, each character playing "his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be" imagines the voices as musical and melodic instruments. There are palpable musical allusions that link the characters to instruments, singing, or melodies: Bernard "twiddles a bit of string and falls silent,"

according to Neville (39); Louis compares the lives of children with “gongs striking” (39); Bernard, as he thinks of the images of his friends, says, “they drum me alive” (117); Jinny “sing[s] like the nightingale whose melody is crowded in the too narrow passage of her throat” (177); Bernard hears “one or two distinct melodies, such as Louis sings, or Neville” (246) and describes Jinny, Susan, and Rhoda as “birds who sang with the rapt egotism of youth by the window” (247); Bernard’s confession of becoming “a certain kind of man, scoring [his] path across life” alludes to musical scores (260). More importantly, Bernard’s note, “whatever the instrument might be,” stresses not what instrument each voice may be representing, but the importance of hearing the sound of music, “a symphony,” the voices create together as a whole. Varga uses the term “musical polyphony” to explain the way the voices “interact with one another to form a multilayered expression,” as she notes “every character is a voice that develops as a result of interacting with other voices and is a part of a whole” (89-90). Varga further asserts that “themes and motifs, ‘images and phrases’ do not characterize any one particular character exclusively. They are rather, exchanged between characters much like a musical theme passes from instrument to instrument” (90). Jane Goldman also asserts that “To talk of ‘separate people’ in *The Waves* is perhaps to miss the point” (186), while quoting Woolf’s own words in her letter, “The six characters were supposed to be one” (*Letters* 4.397). The “one” Woolf writes here does not necessarily mean one character, but rather signifies *one whole* as she further explains, “What you say you felt about the Waves is exactly what I wanted to convey. [. . .] I did mean that in some vague way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one. [. . .] all I can do is to make an artistic whole” (*Letters* 4.397). The point of which Woolf

dwells on here is reiterated in the novel—"we are not single, we are one" (68); "I am not one and simple, but complex and many" (76); "I hate all details of the individual life" (105); "I am made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me" (134); "'I am this, I am that' [. . .] are false" (137); "'I am this; I am that!' [. . .] is false" (138); "I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am" (276)—and demonstrated as what one thinks of his or her friend differs from what the friend actually thinks or does. Neville, for instance, states that Bernard "tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel," but soon after, it is revealed to us that Bernard is "abnormally aware of circumstances" and the feelings of others when he says, "Is she unhappy? I was aware today acutely that poor Simes, with his pimple was feeling, how bitterly, that his chance of making a good impression upon Billy Jackson was remote. Feeling this painfully I invited him to dinner with ardour" (70, 76). The varying characters' voices and perceptions strike multiple notes, like musical instruments, "to make an artistic whole," which makes the individualization or characterization of the characters or of their voices an inefficacious task—the task that, for Woolf, is undesired and unintended as she indicated, "Odd, that they [*The Times*] shd. praise my characters when I meant to have none" (*Diary* 4.47). Woolf writes in her diary during the composition of *The Waves*, "whenever I make a mark I have to think of its relation to a dozen others. And though I could go on ahead easily enough, I am always stopping to consider the whole effect" (*Diary* 3.259). The author's conscious effort to capture the whole effect—very close to that of a composer—in her novel speaks volumes about the instrumentalized voices' harmonic functions. Hearing the music that voices

sing together at various moments, rather than focusing on the individual voices separately and only, reveals the unity of their sounds that escaped certain critics' ears.

The interwoven voices of the characters in multiple scenes unveil the author's effort "to give the effect of the whole" like music. When children's voices reveal their experience around the "kiss" scene, the interior monologues of Louis, Jinny, Susan, and Bernard simultaneously capture the event that occurred around the same time frame. First, Louis describes his experience of being "on the other side of the hedge," seeing something pink pass by, seeing Jinny looking through the chink, and eventually the shock of the event: "She has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered" (12, 13). Jinny's experience, following the same time sequence of Louis, describes seeing "a hole in the hedge," seeing and kissing Louis, and the fluttering effect of the kiss like that of a butterfly: "Now I smell geraniums; I smell earth mould. I dance. I ripple. I am thrown over you like a net of light. I lie quivering flung over you" (13). Susan's interior monologue begins with witnessing the kiss "through a chink in the hedge" (13), and Bernard records Susan passing him in agony after seeing Jinny and Louis kiss. The voices of Louis and Jinny are like two different musical notes being played at the same time, and the notes of Susan's voice are added to their sounds towards the end of their play before adding Bernard's notes to Susan's. The layered voices allow different perspectives on the same event, furnishing us with the contribution of each character's experience, from which the whole can be created. A similar layering of voices occurs during the school years of the characters. At the chapel, the boys give their own account of the headmaster's sermon: Louis recovers his "continuity" as the headmaster reads (35); Neville feels his liberty at risk from the headmaster's prayer; the "growl" of

the headmaster's sermon, notes Bernard, "minced the dance of the white butterflies at the door to powder" (36). Each character even addresses the headmaster differently as he is "Dr. Crane" to Louis, the "brute" to Neville, and "Old Crane" to Bernard (34, 35, 32). The boys listen to the same sermon at the chapel, but their voices reveal different experiences, producing multiple tones that contribute to the complex chords of the event. Likewise, when Percival arrives at the restaurant, the voices of Rhoda, Jinny, and Bernard acknowledging the moment of his arrival—"here he is" (Rhoda); "Here is Percival" (Jinny); "Here is Percival" (Bernard)—are layered like "image on top of image," as Bernard puts it (122, 49). Bernard (and perhaps Woolf), when contemplating the difference of the characters, says, "I must open the little trap-door and let out these linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another" (49). Although the voices might be describing different images of Percival, the linked phrases and the repeated images, as with the writing of De Quincey, stay, creating "a wandering thread" that weaves their sound.

The repeated phrases or words of interweaved voices in particular contribute to creating polyphonic musical texture. As Neville takes his seat on the train, he ends his soliloquy by noting, "It is the first day of the summer holidays" (61). "It is the first day of the summer holidays," says Susan who begins her soliloquy on her train ride to home (61). Rhoda begins (and closes) her soliloquy with "It is the first day of the summer holidays" on the train (64, 65). As they leave the school on trains that are headed to different destinations, their distinct voices capture their own experience at school as well as the forces of encroaching seas of life. In contrast to the traditional linear narration, the

different voices sounding at the same time, through the same phrase which ironically notes the *time* of the year, can be played (and heard) simultaneously in our mind. The echoes of their voices reciting the same phrase during the same time frame, even though they occur in different spaces and their pitch might be different in the musical scale, nonetheless, link their voices together and create a symphonic sound. Likewise, the voices describing the similar imagery can be heard across several characters. Louis says, “the door perpetually shuts and opens” (93). Jinny notes, “The door is opening and shutting” (101) and “The door opens. The door goes on opening” (104). Rhoda also repeats, “The door opens; the tiger leaps. The door opens” (105). These repeated phrases or images across several characters build a connection between them, “lightly joining one thing to another,” as Woolf does in *Mrs. Dalloway* in which Clarissa and Septimus are connected, even though they never interact directly, through reciting the same verse “Fear no more” from Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline* (IV.2). At the second reunion in Hampton Court, Susan, Bernard, Neville, and Jinny disappear to the lake, leaving Louis and Rhoda who whisper like “conspirators” (231). Their opening phrases, “Now they vanish” (Louis [L]) / “They vanish” (Rhoda [R]), signal the interlacing of their voices during this time frame (229). As the multiple same phrases or words are pitched back and forth between them—“What song do we hear?” (L) / “What song do we hear” (R) (229, 230); “thus are divided” (R) / “For ever [. . .] divided” (L) (231); “They still wear the ambiguous draperies of the flowing tide” (L) / “they put off the draperies of the flowing tide” (R) (231)—the interior monologues rapidly move from one character to another, overlapping and uniting their voices.

While the repeated phrases or words of several characters' voices aid in creating the polyphonic texture to the sound of the whole, the repetitions within the individual's soliloquies not only produce rhythm, but their rhythmic voices combined with the voices of their surroundings also create multiple musical effects that echo the rhythm of life. As Louis makes his observations through the window of the eating-house, his repeated use of the words "passing" and "pass" creates the rhythm in his voice: "People go on passing [. . .] They pass the window of this eating-shop incessantly. Motor-cars, vans, motor-omnibuses; and again motor-omnibuses, vans, motor-cars—they pass the window" (92); "They go on passing, they go on passing in disorderly procession" (93); "People go on passing; they go on passing" (93). Too, restating the "motor-omnibuses, vans, motor-cars" delivers an additional rhythmic effect to his voice. Furthermore, the repeated phrases in Louis' soliloquies convey rhythm, and at the same time, resemble the very thing that he is describing, the "eternal procession" of life (and death), as he again relentlessly repeats his phrases (167): "I shall fall like snow and be wasted" (167, 170); "The weight of the world is on our shoulders" (169, 171); "Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres sharp at four-thirty" (168), "Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres at four-thirty" (169, 171); "I hope to inherit an arm-chair and a Turkey carpet" (168), "I shall inherit a chair and a rug" (169). As if repeating these phrases were not enough, Louis makes emphatic remarks on life—"Life passes. The clouds change perpetually over our houses. I do this, do that, and again do this and then that. Meeting and parting, we assemble different forms, make different patterns" (170)—to highlight the rhythmic yet intricate patterns of life. Constantly changing patterns, shapes, and movements of the clouds echo and relate to the life as Louis perceives it. Susan's anaphoric voice iterating "sleep"—"Sleep, sleep,

I croon” (171); “Sleep I sing” (171); “Sleep, sleep, I say” (171); “Sleep, I say” (172); “Sleep, I say, sleep” (172, 173)— creates rhythm in text and mimics what she talks about: singing her “song by the fire like an old shell murmuring on the beach” (171). Although Susan claims that she is “unmelodious,” which reminds us of the author’s own comment, “I’m not regularly musical” (*Letters* 6.426), her singing voice is intermingled with the “rustic music” that she hears “when a dog barks, a bell tinkles, or wheels crunch upon the gravel,” creating and evoking the languid sounds of a country life (171). On the other hand, Bernard’s rapid repetition of phrases describes, and imitates, with the use of consonance such as the “L” sound, the rapid rhythm of life: “we shall kill the rabbit. Life is pleasant. Life is good. I have posted the letter. We shall kill the rabbit” (234). Life’s rapid pulse is further manifested in his description of the sound and movement of the train.

Listen. There is a sound like the knocking of railway trucks in a siding. That is the happy concatenation of one event following another in our lives. Knock, knock, knock. Must, must, must. Must go, must sleep, must wake, must get up [. . .] How we worship that sound like the knocking together of trucks in a siding! (234)

Bernard’s rhythmic voice and his repetitions of the words and phrases increase the sonic quality of the words and transform language (e.g., “Knock, knock, knock. Must, must, must”) into the sounds of trains. These sounds in turn create waves of images and evoke the sense of the rapid train of life.

What enriches the power of music in this symphonic novel is not just the musicalized voices of the characters, but also the sounds and movements of the city and nature that surrounds the characters, as Woolf similarly explored in “Kew Gardens” and in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Throughout the novel, the voices of the characters describe their

surroundings, as they do in the opening passages of the novel. The war imagery—“we are aimed at her [London]”; “missile”; “death”; “roar”; “explode”; “shell”—of the train, which Bernard later links with the rhythm of life as shown above, is contrasted with the “maternal, majestic” sounds of London morning that “hums and murmurs” (111). The sounds of London night also captivate Bernard as he hears:

the sound of the chorus chanting its old, chanting its almost wordless, almost senseless song that comes across courts at night; which we hear now booming round us as cars and omnibuses take people to theatres. (Listen; the cars rush past this restaurant; now and then, down the river, a siren hoots, as a steamer makes for the sea.) (246)

The chanting voices are described as “almost wordless,” similar to the wordless human voices in *The Voyage Out* and “Kew Gardens.” The distinct melodies of the characters’ voices combined with the “chorus” of the city—booming sounds of song, cars, and omnibuses; hooting siren—contribute to the sound of the whole. For Neville, the sounds of London night, however, differ from Bernard’s:

The fruit on the curtain swells beneath the parrot’s beak. Cheep, cheep, creaks the fire, like the cheep of insects in the middle of a forest. Cheep, cheep, it clicks while out there the branches thrash the air, and now, like a volley of shot, a tree falls. These are the sounds of a London night. (199)

While Bernard hears the sound of the chorus mixed with the sounds of machineries (cars, omnibuses, or a steamer), Neville’s description focuses on the sounds and movements of nature: “cheep,” “creaks,” and “clicks” as well as thrashing branches and a falling tree. Various sounds and movements of the city are layered with the characters’ rhythmic voices, creating polyphonic texture to the music of London. Adding to the musical notes of Bernard and Neville are the sounds and movements of London noted by Rhoda that encompass both natural and mechanical voices.

The steamer hoots; the light on the electric rails flashes; the trees gravely bow and bend. The flare hangs over London. Here is an old woman, quietly returning, and a man, a late fisherman comes down the terrace with his rod. Not a sound, not a movement must escape us. (230)

As Rhoda, in this passage, emphasizes, and asks of us to pay attention to, the sound and movement of the surroundings, the prominent presence of these choral voices must not be ignored. Each character's unique perception of the surroundings magnifies the sounds of the choruses that partake in the symphonic composition of life itself as Bernard notes, "The clock ticks; the woman sneezes; the waiter comes—there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification. Listen: a whistle sounds, wheels rush, the door creaks on its hinges" (294). Melba Cuddy-Keane, who identifies "noises [being] treated as voices" in this novel, contends that "the fragmented, discontinuous, polytextural music conveys a wholeness, a comprehensiveness, that embraces the communal life of the universe" (90). The instrumentalized voices of the characters as well as the choral voices that surround them together create a powerful symphony through which "the effect of the whole" that the author intended leaves an everlasting impression in one's heart.

Chapter III.

Voice, Music, and Religion

As the study of voice and music in *The Waves* takes us on a voyage of Woolf's symphonic novel, the question on the purpose of creating the powerful symphony still remains. Analyzing the function of voice and music in the text reveals the correlations between music and religion as Woolf evokes the divine through the power of music. This chapter explores the religious significance of the silent symphonic voices in the novel to better understand Woolf's spirituality and her new literary expression within the aesthetic experiments of the modernist movement in literature and art.

We are the Words; We are the Music; We are the Thing Itself

The scenes involving one of the most difficult moments in life, the death of a friend, present the religious significance of music in Woolf's experimental novel and demonstrate the way Woolf connects music to her religious vision in writing. After Percival's death, Bernard asks, "[W]hat form will our communication take?" and visits the National Gallery where he experiences the moment of "exaltation" (155). Paintings, similar to music, "do not nudge; they do not point. Thus they expand my consciousness of [Percival] and bring him back to me differently," notes Bernard (156). As mentioned, the metaphoric sound of the bell in Bernard's head which melts into color, shape, and texture of the painting strikes him with "[a]rrows of sensation" (157). Although he is "glutted with sensations," Bernard, nevertheless, has trouble putting it into words: "Ideas break a thousand times for once that they globe themselves entire. They break; they fall

over me ‘Line and colours they survive, therefore . . .’” (157-58). His unfinished sentence signifies the limitation of expression with words in describing the meaning of the mystic experience he encounters through a medium of painting. The ideas he “*thought* to grasp” instead “break” and “fall over” (157; emphasis mine). In spite of the magnificence of the painting—“the blue Madonna streaked with tears” that channels Bernard’s emotion—and its ability to represent and sustain human life, Bernard repeatedly opts for music. What the painting at the gallery does for Bernard, music does for him and more: it acts as a solace and as a means to grasp and communicate his experience and inner thoughts. As already noted in his simile, “How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole—again like music. What a symphony,” Bernard (and Woolf) turns to music when striving to capture the whole. One might have noticed that Bernard says “again like music” which is because he resorts to music again and again when the thoughts and words are not enough to describe the human experiences and the unattainable. When thinking of Percival and his death, Bernard notes,

there should be music, some wild carol. Through the window should come a hunting-song from some rapid unapprehended life—a sound that shouts among the hills and dies away. What is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense—that comes suddenly to my mind, thinking of him. (243; emphasis mine)

The startling, unexpected, unaccountable, and nonsensible death of Percival is best and altogether embodied in music: “some wild carol”; “a hunting-song.” Music, for Bernard, (perhaps is the only thing that) can encompass his feelings, “for pain words are lacking.”

When thinking about his experience of first love, he also turns to music:

Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting-song, Percival’s music; but 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. (250; emphasis mine)

Whether it is the fleeting complex feeling of the first love or the painful death of a friend, words are nothing but the “flagging, foolish transcripts” when describing these experiences and inner thoughts. Paintings allow one access to some of the magnificent and mystic moments in life, however brief it might be, as Bernard states, “I sometimes go there [gallery], even now, to bring back exaltation and Percival. But it did not last” (264); however, Woolf admires and employs music for its ability to create and recreate the similar mystic moments and to say “all there is to say at once” without having to articulate (just as Rachel points out in *The Voyage Out*) as well as for its religious potential, all of which Woolf demonstrates through Rhoda’s experience in the scene that appears immediately after Bernard’s gallery scene. Rhoda, who wanders through the streets of London, visits a music hall where “the beetle-shaped men” play the quartet with their violins (163).

‘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. (163; emphasis mine)

Whereas “something unvisual beneath” the visual art of painting that Bernard hopes to find at the gallery is, as his unfinished sentence attests, “hidden in the depths of [his] mind some day to fructify” (156, 157), Rhoda’s quartet experience at the music hall reveals that “the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing” is not only “visible,” but most importantly, as Rhoda notes, “here stated.” What Bernard (and other forms of

communication) could not, the violinists “place it very accurately”: so “perfect” that Rhoda emphasizes “Very little is left outside.” Emilie Crapoulet’s analysis on music in Woolf’s short story, “The String Quartet,” can be extended for our apprehension of music in this scene. Crapoulet interprets music, for Woolf, as a bridge between the “meaning we apprehend before we find words to describe it, and a verbalized, highly representative literary expression of this meaning” (par. 18). Rhoda does not state the meaning of her experience, but rather notes, “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. [. . .] I will make a pilgrimage” (163). Rhoda’s experience presents music’s connections to Woolf’s religious stance that are permeated throughout the novel for our consideration: the first is her refusal to define meanings in things, which includes her view on religion; the second is the power of music to (re)create the individual and communal religious experiences or moments; the third and the most significant point she makes through this power of music is how “we” (the characters and the readers) can create these moments.

As discussed earlier, the em dash after Septimus’ discovery of “the birth of a new religion” and the ellipsis after Bernard’s exaltation at the gallery signal the limits of the words, but they also hint the author’s reluctance to state the meaning of these mystic experiences. And not only that, as James points out in *To the Lighthouse*, “For nothing was simply one thing” (186), Woolf explicitly states that “I meant *nothing* by The Lighthouse. [. . .] I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions [. . .] Whether its [*sic*] right or wrong I don’t know, but directly I’m told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me” (*Letters* 3.385; emphasis in original). Woolf wants the readers to make “the deposit for their own emotions” in

things or scenes she paints. She wishes the same for *The Waves*; as Neville puts it “Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure” (81). Using figures—such as “oblong” and “square” rather than writing out the meaning, for Rhoda “see[s] only figures” as a child (21)—to illustrate Rhoda’s mystic experience in music displays Woolf’s belief in the multiplicity of things, especially in religion, and music’s ability to offer this multiplicity. Her spiritual fluidity in contrast to the certainty of religion and liturgy makes frequent appearances in the novel. As a young boy, Bernard finds that the headmaster’s “words are too hearty to be true. Yet he is by this time convinced of their truth” (32). This religious certainty is juxtaposed with the characters’ repeating phrase, “I do not know,” which fills the novel, and with Bernard, who says, “whether there is substance or truth in it I do not know” (288). In St. Paul’s cathedral, old Bernard “scoff[s] at the floridity and absurdity of some scrolloping tomb; and the trumpets and the victories and the coats of arms and the certainty, so sonorously repeated, of resurrection, of eternal life” (282). For Woolf, nothing is simply one thing, which includes her idea of religion, as Louis exclaims, “There is always more to be understood; a discord to be listened for; a falsity to be reprimanded” (202). With “its concord and its discord and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath” allowing multiple meanings to exist simultaneously, the symphonic voices of the characters allow and ask the readers to deposit their own emotions in scenes, while “the author has no part.” What the music (and the novel) means for each of us depends on what we place inside of the “oblong” and “square” of the structure regardless of our and the author’s (dis)belief in religion.

The numinous beauty of Rhoda's quartet experience demonstrates the power of music to (re)create the religious experience that goes beyond individual worship. In 1921, Woolf writes about her own quartet experience in her diary. After attending the performance of Beethoven's string quartets concerts, Woolf writes,

every afternoon for a week I've been up to the Aeolian Hall; taken my seat right at the back; put my bag on the floor & listened to Beethoven Quartets. Do I dare say listened? Well, but if one gets a lot of pleasure, really divine pleasure, & knows the tunes, & only occasionally thinks of other things—surely I may say I listened. (*Diary* 2.114)

Her diary entry indicates Woolf's awareness of music's numinous quality. In a study of Woolf's relation to the tradition of Christianity, Knight acknowledges music, for Woolf, as "invokers of divinity and/or the universal," and argues that Woolf was drawn to music's "ability to invoke a sense of the numinous without quite being forced to say what it is, to put it into words" (36, 41). The "divine pleasure" Woolf records here while listening to music offers a new way of looking at religious experience and a possible motive for the musical orchestration of the voices in her experimental novel. Recent scholarly conversations around Woolf's religion seem to agree that Woolf sought a new literary form to describe religious experiences or spirituality. Paulsell (as mentioned earlier) posits that Woolf, through her writing, unveils her "desire for a new form [. . .] that would do the work religion used to do, but could no longer" ("Family Resemblances" 87). Similarly, Pericles Lewis, in *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, argues that despite Woolf's resistance to institutional religion, she sought to create "a new form of spirituality independent of the Christian God" (144). Bernard's exaltation at the gallery, which he also calls, "revelation," communing with Percival—"[their] moment of uninterrupted community"—through the art in silence possesses a spiritual

quality (158, 264), recalling the “silent worship,” the term Woolf’s aunt Caroline Stephen describes in her book *Quaker Strongholds* (2). In addition, the six characters’ silent communions at their reunions bear a certain resemblance to the Quaker meetings Woolf attended with her aunt during her recovery from an illness. In their first reunion, the characters who “sit silent” around Percival note “the swelling and splendid moment created by us from Percival” (145, 146). Their brief silent communion during their second reunion, which Jinny notes “as if the miracle had happened” and the fact that the word “silence” is repeated at least eight times in this moment that “lasts but one second,” demonstrates that the silence (and the silent voices of the novel) can lead to a spiritual experience (224-25, 277). These miraculous moments echo what Stephen describes about the first Quaker meeting she attended in the aforementioned book: “I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence [. . .] To sit down in silence could at the least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven” (4). Although there are some strong similarities, the religious experiences Woolf creates through music (and the silent symphonic voices) surpasses this individual communion with God, which separates Woolf’s attempt from her aunt’s religious practice. Not only is Rhoda’s mystic quartet experience steeped in religious allusions, such as “consolation,” “pilgrimage,” or “this is the end,” which recalls Jesus’ words “It is finished” (John 19:30 NIV), it takes place in an unexpected place to the unlikely people—in a music hall “where one hears music among somnolent people” who “cluster like maggots” (162). Bernard’s exaltation through the painting at the gallery offers an individual experience, but the religious experience through music is not limited

to an individual nor discriminates between its audience members. When she arrives at the music hall, Rhoda describes the audiences “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” (162); but after the quartet experience, she notes, “We have been hauled over the shingle, down to the sea” (163). Like “a wave” of emotion, music moves us and helps us. It is not Rhoda alone who experiences the power of music although the sensation she feels from music is unique to her and different from what others feel; rather, it is a communal experience, as Rhoda also notes “This is *our* triumph; this is *our* consolation.” The individual and yet universal qualities of music that allow the private experience as well as the shared experience among people are deeply spiritual and uniquely powerful, which are certainly new and different from the religious paintings or “the Christian God.”

What is very subtle yet important about Rhoda’s quartet scene is how Rhoda shifts the power of music she experiences as an audience into something that she and others create. The passive audiences who sit and listen to music change into the active participants and creators of music and the sacred space as the swift change of words indicates: Rhoda’s reflection changes from “*The players* take the square and place it upon the oblong. *They place* it very accurately; *they make* a perfect dwelling-place” to “*we have made* oblongs and stood them upon squares. [. . .] *We have made* a dwelling-place” (163-64; emphasis mine). “The players/they” are replaced by “we,” and it is us who make the structure and the dwelling-place. Rhoda’s passage can be further elucidated through what Woolf calls her “philosophy” in “A Sketch of the Past” wherein she notes the way

she perceives music and religion in relation to her writing (72). In this autobiographical writing, she explains,

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. (72)

Here, Woolf not only sees the connection—that is “hidden a pattern” (72)—between words, music, and religion, which is realized in *The Waves* through her orchestration of the silent symphonic voices, but also considers we, all human beings, and the whole world as “a work of art” and “the parts of the work of art.” The emphasis is not on Shakespeare, Beethoven, and God, but on the “we” that makes “the words,” “the music,” and “the thing itself.” Rhoda and the audience in the music hall become the music and the parts of the religious, mystic experience they create together through music. Ultimately, we, the audience, are “the thing itself,” the music and the sacred being, the “dwelling-place,” which recalls the scripture “you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in your midst” (1 Corinthians 3:16 NIV) as well as her aunt Stephen’s writing of the human as “a note in the divine harmony.” In other words, it is not that Woolf denies the existence of the authors/creators or the religion itself, but rather we and our acts of reading, listening, and living, which make and carry on the works, are being accentuated and treasured as sacred. After buying a picture of Beethoven, Bernard thinks, “I was the inheritor; I, the *continuer*; I, the person miraculously appointed to *carry it on*” (253-54; emphasis mine). This profound philosophy of hers tells us how Woolf views both ourselves and the world around us—the beauty and importance of all creation, even in its suffering and incomplete state. “Thank the actors, not the author [. . .] Or ourselves, the

audience,” says Bartholomew in *Between the Acts* to his sister, about whom he says, “How imperceptive her religion made her! [. . .] Skimming the surface, she ignored the battle in the mud” (203). In contrast to a religion that emphasizes the goodness of God and His creations, Woolf’s sacred being, the dwelling-place, portrayed through the voices of the characters is multifaceted. Bernard, for instance, says, “Let a man get up and say, ‘Behold, this is the truth’, and instantly I perceive a sandy cat filching a piece of fish in the background. Look, you have forgotten the cat” (187). Louis also takes note of “cats scraping their mangy sides upon blistered chimney-stacks; broken windows” (220). The power of music Woolf creates by recording the discords, “the battle in the mud,” as well as the concords through the voices of the characters and the world surrounding them communicates the sense of divinity she sees in us, human beings, and the world, which includes everyday experiences of ordinary life that embrace illness, terror, despair, and darkness.

The way Woolf puts more emphasis on the “we” as the creators of the symphonic universe rather than on God through her rendering of Percival further informs us of her religious vision. Many critics have connected Percival and the novel with Wagner’s opera *Parsifal*, which Woolf saw at the Bayreuth festival. Woolf writes in her essay, “one is bewildered by a music that continues with the utmost calm and intensity independently of them” (*Essays* 1.289). This description on *Parsifal* sketches *The Waves* itself, suggests Paulsell, who also notes Woolf describing *Parsifal* as “more religious than anything” (qtd. in *Religion* 155). The religious significance of *Parsifal* is, according to Julia Briggs, manifested in the two dinner scenes of *The Waves*.

[*Parsifal*] is a deeply religious, even religiose work, with the administration of the Eucharist at the end of Act I at its heart. *The Waves*

recalls that structure through the farewell party for Percival, a secular act of communion, signified by its three choric sequences, and recapitulated in the Hamptons Court reunion, much as the Last Supper itself is recalled in the foot-washing of Act III of *Parsifal*. The imagery of communion and the Last Supper was to run through Woolf's book. (qtd. in Knight 34)

The similarities that exist between *Parsifal* and *The Waves* seem almost intentional as Woolf notes of being "bewildered by" the music within the religious work, *Parsifal*, which she similarly and carefully constructs through the silent symphonic voices in her novel. However, Woolf's treatment of Percival, whom the characters revere as "a hero," "captain," "a leader," and "a God," in her novel best exemplifies her philosophy, focusing on illuminating the six characters as divine beings over the religion itself (123, 153, 136). Woolf paints Percival as "the most god-like figure" at the school chapel, as Paulsell notes (*Religion* 154). And the images of Percival wearing "a sun-helmet" and riding on "a flea-bitten mare" (136, 137) closely recall Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. These religious allusions that tie the Christ-like images to Percival add more shocks to his sudden and meaningless—compared to the death of Christ—death. The characters, who have no surnames just like the disciples in the New Testament, tell their stories of Percival, similar to the Bible which is comprised of the stories of Jesus told by the disciples. Even though he is an important and a central figure—like Jesus is to the Bible—to the story and the six characters' lives, Percival's presence is only channeled through the characters' voices, which signals Woolf putting the importance on the characters themselves (and us) rather than on God. At their first dinner, the six characters describe sitting around Percival. "A single flower," the red carnation on the table, becomes, as they look together, "a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own

contribution” (127). This idea of a whole flower with many petals mirrors the one body with many parts that Paul writes about in I Corinthians (NIV) through which he urges unity while addressing the issues with the church: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (12:12); “the body is not made up of one part but of many” (12:14); “there are many parts, but one body” (12:20); “All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it” (12:27). It also recalls the “‘Joint sittings’—[Quaker] meetings, that is, of men and women Friends in one body” that Stephen writes about (*Quaker Strongholds* 8). Notwithstanding Percival’s God-like status, however, the seven-sided flower—the flower, which later will “become a six-sided flower; made of six lives” in their second reunion without Percival—proclaims all seven characters as equal parts or participants (229). Each petal is unique with “red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves,” but each and every one is equally important in creating the whole flower regardless of its difference and (dis)belief. This message, which is truly powerful for Woolf’s audiences then and even now, also speaks for the power of music created by the characters—each with its unique voice, but all contributing to the creations of the religious moments they share. Furthermore, by taking away Percival’s “voice,” the novel demonstrates the characters (and all human beings) as the parts of the work of art and most importantly as the creators of this work of art, the symphonic universe. At the end of the first reunion dinner, Bernard exclaims, “We are not slaves bound to suffer incessantly unrecorded petty blows on our bent backs. We are not sheep either, following a master. We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time” (146). We, human beings, are not sheep, following a master, Christ-like, Percival. By killing Percival shortly after, the

novel reinforces the concept of human beings as the “creators” as the six characters reunite in Hampton Court and recreate the mystic moments.

Anxiety is at rest. The vainest of us, Louis perhaps, does not care what people think. Neville’s tortures are at rest. Let others prosper—that is what he thinks. Susan hears the breathing of all her children safe asleep. Sleep, sleep, she murmurs. Rhoda has rocked her ships to shore. Whether they have foundered, whether they have anchored, she cares no longer. (224-25)

Here, such a moment is recreated by the characters themselves through their silent voices without Percival’s presence. Moreover, shifting the imagery of light Percival is strongly associated with onto the characters and the world around them endows their voices with the religious significance. At their first reunion, the characters note, “[Percival] seems to pump into this room this prickly light, this intensity of being,” which is prefigured in the preceding interlude, “*Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence*” (119, 110), alluding to Jesus as in “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12 NIV). Immediately after Bernard’s statement, “We are creators,” he notes that “The yellow canopy of our tremendous energy hangs like a burning cloth above our heads. Theatres, music halls and lamps in private houses make that light” (146). It is no longer Percival, the Christ-like figure, who shines the light, but the energy of the characters and their surroundings that do so. The image of “a burning cloth” above the characters’ heads transfigures the characters into the God-like image, mirroring the image of Jesus with a halo. The characters who were “silhouettes” without Percival’s presence prior to their communion transform into divine beings at the end of their first dinner through the powerful moments they create and share together (122). At their second reunion, the imagery of light becomes an even more prominent feature that describes the six characters—“we ourselves, walking six abreast, what do we oppose, with this random

flicker of light in us” (227); “let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out” (229)—which Bernard recalls later in his life,

Against the gateway, against some cedar tree I saw blaze bright, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, Louis, Susan and myself, our life, our identity. [. . .] we—against the brick, against the branches, we six, out of how many million millions, for one moment out of what measureless abundance of past time and time to come, burnt there triumphant. The moment was all; the moment was enough. (277-78)

The “light in us,” at first glance, appears to parallel “the inner light,” which Woolf’s aunt Stephen describes—“a light which burns and purifies; a voice which subdues; he finds himself in the presence of his God”—to explain the “Personal religion” (*Quaker Strongholds* 26, 32-33). However, the imagery of light Woolf illustrates here extends beyond the individual’s religious sphere. It is the “we six” characters that blaze and burn. All six characters become the light and the creator of the moment. Instead of God’s voice Moses hears from the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4 NIV) or the “megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking” voice the audiences hear from the bushes in *Between the Acts* (186), it is the characters themselves who burn and create the light together and it is the characters’ silent voices that the readers hear as they chorus and create the mystic, religious moments in *The Waves*.

The ways in which the communions are structured in two reunion dinner scenes and the voices of the characters function within the structure are indicative of the power of creation that lies within us. After they were separated since their childhood, the six characters reunite in London for Percival’s farewell dinner and reunite in Hampton Court for dinner later in life without him. Just as Bernard’s “happiness” and Neville’s “misery” and “agony” open the first dinner scene, both dinner scenes begin and end with the

discords of the characters' voices, which resemble "the battle in the mud" so to speak, and in between the discords show the passages that mark the concords of, or unities in, their voices (116, 122, 140). Especially, it is not just one moment of unity, but the multiple moments of unities that transpire in each dinner scene. The list below summarizes the pattern that exists within the two dinner scenes.

The first reunion dinner in London with Percival:

- Discord (111-22)
- Concord (122-23): "sitting together now we love each other and believe in our own endurance" (123)
- Discord (123-26)
- Concord (126-27): "We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion" (126)
- Discord (127-35)
- Concord (135-42): "All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound" (135)
- Discord (142-45)
- Concord (145-46): "we pray, holding in our hands this common feeling" (145)
- Discord (146-47)

The second reunion dinner in Hampton Court without Percival:

- Discord (210-24)
- Concord (224-25): "as if the miracle had happened" (225)
- Discord (225-28)
- Concord (228-29): "A mysterious illumination" (229)
- Discord (229-35)

The structure of the discords and concords in these scenes is rhythmical, imitating the oscillating appearance of the interludes and the motion of the waves. This rhythmical structure and their silent symphonic voices singing the concords and discords together create a mystic experience for the characters (and the readers) in the first dinner scene and then recreate it in the second dinner scene. Bernard, during their first moment of unity, elucidates the way their voices function by comparing it to the songs of the birds.

We who have been separated by our youth (the oldest is not yet twenty-five), who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked [. . .] now come nearer; and shuffling closer on our perch in this restaurant where everybody's interests are at variance, and the incessant passage of traffic chafes us with distractions, and the door opening perpetually [. . .] sitting together now we love each other and believe in our own endurance. (123)

The voices of the characters echo the songs of “eager birds,” each remorselessly and savagely tapping, during their discords, but by sitting and singing together, their voices combined with the rhythm of “the incessant passage of traffic” and “the door opening perpetually” create a united harmonic moment similar to the songs of the birds that run “*together in swift scales like the interlacings of a mountain stream*” hinted in the preceding interlude (109). In another concordant moment, Louis’ soliloquy marks the interlacing of various sounds and voices, together creating the symphonic sounds of the universe as a whole:

The roar of London [. . .] 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 merry-makers—all churned into one sound, steel blue, circular. (135)

“All separate sounds” churning into one circular sound that Louis senses in the passage acutely captures this scene itself where the characters’ voices are merging in “*swift scales*” to create a harmonic sound (which also describes the novel as a whole). During their unity, which occurs momentarily, the interior monologues move from one character to another swiftly. The characters note the brevity of this moment which begins as “a stone fall[s] into a pond round which minnows swarm” and ends when the “stone is sunk; the moment is over” (136, 143). From the time Rhoda observes “one thing melts into another” to the end of the moment where she notes “The circle is destroyed. We are

thrown asunder”—during this extremely short time frame (a stone falling and landing in the bottom of the pond)—the voices of the characters are rapidly piled up on top of each other and “are merged in one turning wheel of single sound” (135, 143). The following shows the initials of each character in the order their interior monologues appear in this scene with the additional layered voices of Louis and Rhoda indicated in the parentheses (the first parenthesis is clearly marked in the text itself while the second parenthetical dialogue is noted based on the context):

R-J-L-N-B-R-L-S-J-N-R-N-J-(L-R-L-R-L)-J-L-N-B-(L-R)

Like the “one turning wheel,” the sound of Rhoda’s voice that notes the beginning of their unity loops around and returns to her voice at the end of their unity, churning the characters’ (layered) voices into a “single sound” and merging the different forces of life—life and death; ecstasy and despair; light and darkness—into one space. As Louis notes “Death is woven in with the violets” (141), the complexity of things existing in the same space seems to occupy Woolf throughout her life:

Which should I describe first—the living half of the room, or the sleeping half? They must be described separately; yet they were always running together. How they fought each other; that is, how often I was in a rage in that room; and in despair; and in ecstasy; how I read myself into a trance of perfect bliss. (“A Sketch of the Past” 123)

Paulsell posits that Woolf’s own bedroom, where “rage,” “despair,” “ecstasy,” and “bliss” were fighting each other and yet “always running together,” as “the sacred space” and a book or a poem, for Woolf, serving as “a portable sacred space” through her rituals and practices of reading and writing (*Religion* 166). Likewise, Woolf seems to find the sacred space in music which she offers to the reader through the voices of her characters. Besides their layered voices, the repeated phrases within the individual’s voice as well as

the repetitions across the different characters' voices in their short moment of unity—"Percival rides a flea-bitten mare" (B)/"Percival, riding alone on a flea-bitten mare" (R) (136, 137); "'I am this, I am that' [. . .] are false" (L)/"'I am this; I am that!' [. . .] is false" (N) (137, 138); "The great procession passes" (R)/ "The procession passes" (R) (140-41)—create a polyphonic musical effect, uniting their voices. As the repetitions within each voice and between the voices along with the interior monologues rapidly moving from one character to another enkindle the symphonic moment, the voices echo and resonate the sacred space of the oneness that surpasses the barriers of the world and unites everything and everyone. The following passage captures such a moment and the space:

"While we advance down this avenue," said Louis, "I leaning slightly upon Jinny, Bernard arm-in-arm with Neville, and Susan with her hand in mind, it is difficult not to weep, calling ourselves little children, praying that God may keep us safe while we sleep. It is sweet to sing together, clasping hands, afraid of the dark, while Miss Curry plays the harmonium."

"The iron gates have rolled back," said Jinny. "Time's fangs have ceased their devouring. We have triumphed over the abysses of space, with rouge, with powder, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs."

"I grasp, I hold fast," said Susan. "I hold firmly to this hand, anyone's, with love, with hatred; it does not matter which."

"The still mood, the disembodied mood is on us," said Rhoda, "and we enjoy this momentary alleviation (it is not often that one has no anxiety) when the walls of the mind become transparent. Wren's palace, like the quartet played to the dry and stranded people in the stalls, makes an oblong. A square is stood upon the oblong and we say, 'This is our dwelling-place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside.'"

"The flower," said Bernard, "the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives."

"A mysterious illumination," said Louis, "visible against those yew trees."

"Built up with much pain, many strokes," said Jinny.

"Marriage, death, travel, friendship," said Bernard; "town, and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have

made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out.” (228-29)

As Woolf writes in her diary in 1928, “The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. [. . .] to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. [. . .] I want to put practically everything in; yet to saturate,” this moment of the characters’ last unity in the second dinner scene appears to be faithful to what Woolf had envisioned for her novel (*Diary* 3.209-10). This very saturated passage “give[s] the moment whole” and precisely encapsulates Woolf’s attempt in *The Waves*. Louis’ interior monologue noting the characters walking down the avenue while holding hands, praying, and singing together recalls his experience as a child which he notes, “Miss Curry spreads wide the black book on the harmonium. It is difficult not to weep as we sing, as we pray that God may keep us safe while we sleep, calling ourselves little children. [. . .] it is sweet to sing together, leaning slightly, I towards Susan, Susan towards Bernard, clasping hands, afraid of much” (29). As the characters’ voices sing together, the past and the present moments are interweaved into a unity, as if connected by an invisible wandering thread, which “triumph[s] over the abysses of space” as Jinny notes. Their silent voices transcending from one to another and from one space to another space paints the “world immune from change” (107), which is closely portrayed in the dinner scene in *To the Lighthouse*. “[I]n this profound stillness,” Mrs. Ramsey notes, “Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all around them. [. . .] there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out [. . .] Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures” (105). Similarly, in *The Waves*, the characters’ silent voices together create the space that “shines out” and overcomes the temporal limits. In addition, the passage also displays music’s ability to allow both the

individual experience, as Jinny's voice reflects her own perception of this mystical moment ("with rouge, with power, with flimsy pocket-handkerchiefs") and Susan's reflecting her own ("with love, with hatred; it does not matter which"), and the communal experience. Music through which Rhoda sees "we" as the parts of the work of art and the sacred beings that make the words, the music, and the thing itself occurs here as well. At the "Wren's palace" in Hampton Court, all six characters experience "the disembodied mood," the spiritual moment that Rhoda experienced through quartet in the music hall. Rhoda emphasizes, "*we say*, 'This is our dwelling-place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside'" (emphasis mine). By singing together and sharing the moment they create together, the characters become the music and the sacred being, the "dwelling-place." The subsequent statements—the flower becoming "a six-sided flower; made of six lives" and the "mysterious illumination," the six characters' light, blazing against the yew trees—prove once again the characters as not only the parts of the work of art, but also the thing itself, the creators of "One life." The sacred space of this oneness, which is made up with "much pain, many strokes" and "a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower," created through the characters' silent voices of concords and discords is a heavenly embodiment of Woolf's spirituality and what she believes in us, all human beings, and the world. The novel reaches its zenith by bringing together the myriad voices into a symphonic whole through which Woolf attains her religious vision.

Conclusion

Investigating the connection between music and religion in Woolf's writing rather than studying her words in relation to music or religion only and separately offered valuable insights for the novel of voices: The musicality in her prose and the musical knowledge she revealed through Roger Fry's biography casted light on her writing method for *The Waves*. At the same time, observing her aunt Stephen's meditation on human beings in regard to divine as well as the religious significance of her work Paulsell recognized informed and steered us to consider, and listen for, the ethereal aural qualities of voices as they connect human beings closer to divine through music.

Over the course of this study, I have explored Woolf's distinct narrative method of using voices, demonstrated the ways the multifarious tunes and rhythms of voices kindle the musical harmonic symphony in the novel, and argued for music's connection to Woolf's religious vision in writing. She evokes the divine through the power of music created by the characters' silent symphonic voices—all contributing to the creations of the religious moments they share and illuminating the sacred space of the oneness that unites everything and everyone. Future critics might explore the unifying and healing power of music in her last novel—"Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken"; "we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole. [. . .] We act different parts; but are the same" (*Between the Acts* 120, 192)—and consider how Woolf's demonstration differs from that of *The Waves*.

The numinous power of *The Waves* that Woolf creates by bringing together the myriad voices into a symphonic whole transcends the boundaries of language and echoes the ineffable which, in a way, evokes a spiritual experience for the reader. “The process of reading/interpreting is bound to the process of creation. Music allows Woolf to envision not only a different kind of novel but also a different kind of reading experience,” recognizes Varga (101). Through the process of reading, and listening to, the voices of the novel, the reader becomes the part of the powerful musical performance and, more importantly, the creator of this aesthetic, spiritual orchestration of the novel that sounds profoundly religious. “Sounds made harmonies,” writes Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, “All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—” (22-23). Perhaps what Woolf conceived as “a new religion” in this unfinished sentence from her earlier novel is “here stated,” as Rhoda puts it, and is brought into life in *The Waves*.

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