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Problematized Self in Virginia Woolf's The Waves: A Structuralist Perspective

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Özet

Edebi eserlere yönelik yapısalcı yaklaşım metin içerisindeki biçimsel uyumu göstermeyi ve sözcükler arasındaki bütünleştirici ilişkiyi ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Virginia Woolf'un *The Waves* başlıklı romanının yapısalcı bakış açısından incelenmesi, romandaki özyaşamöyküsel özellikler sebebiyle uyumsuz bir yaklaşım gibi görünebilir. Fakat, özellikle metindeki semboller ve ikili zıtlıkların işlevsel hale getirdiği anlatsal canlılık metnin yapısalcılık açısından incelenebilmesini mümkün kılar. Benlik ve kendini ispatlama kavramları, “dalga,” “halka” ve “güneş” gibi belli başlı sembollerle, roman bölümlerinin ve her bölümdeki giriş kısmının sembolik yapılandırılmasıyla somutlaştırılıp sorunsallaştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Virginia Woolf, yapısalcılık, benlik, kendini ispatlama, dalga sembolü, ikili zıtlıklar, metinsel bütünlük, biçimsel uyum.

Abstract

Structural approach to literary texts aims to demonstrate the formal coherence in the text and to find out the unifying relationships between the words. The analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* from a structural perspective seems to be discrepant due to the autobiographical elements which are foregrounded in the novel. But, the narrative vividness which is made functional particularly in the use of symbols and binary oppositions in the text renders the structural analysis applicable to the text. The concepts of self and self-fulfilment are concretised and problematised through certain symbols such as “wave,” “ring,” and “the sun” and through the symbolic construction of the interludes and chapters of the novel.

Key Words: Virginia Woolf, structuralism, self, self-fulfilment, the symbol of wave, binary oppositions, textual unity, formal coherence.

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Structuralism in a general sense is based upon the science of language demonstrated by Saussurean linguistics. It offers a scientific view of how meaning can be achieved, not only in literary works, but in all forms of communication. Structuralism has two roots both of which depend basically on Saussurean linguistics; one is modern structuralism, a post Second World War development and the other is the structuralism of the Prague School Theorists, a group of theorists who were active between the 1920s and the 1940s. Modern structuralism, developed in the 1950s and the 1960s, is largely a French movement, the important figures of which are the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and literary critic Roland Barthes. Common to all perspectives that approach a literary text structurally is the synchronic approach rather than studying structures or systems with respect to their history. Structuralism, in other words, is interested in the mechanism which makes meaning formally possible, and examines the language of the text as a linguistic entity where the dynamism within the text as a whole is defined in relationships of combination and contrast to one another. When applied to literary texts, structuralist analysis focuses largely on binary oppositions in the narrative to exhibit the conflicting and harmonising elements in language. The formal existence of meaning becomes possible only in the workings of the binary oppositions which, according to structuralism, establishes the narrational pattern of the text. In the essence of structuralism, it has been claimed that the basic elements of language are arbitrarily existent and can only be detected in relation to their functions rather than their causes. The functioning of the elements of language creates a symbolic and complex dynamism in a literary text.

When this is the case, to approach a novel, especially one which carries autobiographical echoes, would sound irrelevant to the structural approach, but in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, the overt repercussions of the autobiographical narration do not become an obstacle in the structural analysis of the text of the novel. On the contrary, it is within the frame of the autobiographical projections on the text that the general principles of literary structuralism can firmly be applied. This approach does not aim at going back to the origin of the text and at creating a biographical or psychoanalytical discourse. Structural analysis, according to Galland, "proposes an immanent approach to the text in order to demonstrate the text's coherence. [It] does not attempt to follow the meaning by commenting upon the text word by word ... but it seeks the relationships behind the words which unite them" (1976:4). When approached structurally, the working system of the text, which demonstrates a symbolic structure, is analysed at a particular moment of time due to the particularity experienced in the momentariness by Woolf. It is this synchronic particularity which matches the symbols, oppositions, and other elements of language in *The Waves* with Virginia Woolf's "moments of being."

One example for this is quite remarkable in the early pages of “A Sketch of the Past:”

It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. (Woolf, 1984:5)

The synchronic approach towards the symbolic projection of the momentary experience in *The Waves* might seem to be limiting the textual analysis to a particular moment of time. Yet, in the analysis of *The Waves*, adopting that kind of approach does not limit one because each experience, each moment of being, is significant at the moment when it is lived. Actually it is Woolf’s impressionism which creates this synchronism spontaneously. The interaction between the language used by Woolf and her relationship with life itself is the essence of the problematic portrayal of the self in her novel. The binary oppositions that dominate the text abundantly mostly derive from her preoccupation with some mystical feelings. When Virginia Woolf had completed *To the Lighthouse*, she wrote about her mystical feelings, displaying more about their nature and meaning. Structuralism basically disregards such literary and autobiographical background of the text and foregrounds how meanings, that are formulated through the dynamism within the language construction, can possibly exist. The aim is not to detect what these meanings are contentwise but how they are formwise. Woolf’s thinking about mysticism explores the very construction of *The Waves* and this was a new area of contemplation:

I wished to add some remarks to this, on the mystical side of this solicitude; how it is not one self but something in the universe that one’s left with. It is this that is frightening and exciting in the midst of my profound gloom, depression, boredom, whatever it is. One sees a fin, passing far out. What image can I reach to convey what I mean. Really there is none, I think. The interesting thing is that in all my feeling and thinking I have never come up against this before. Life is soberly and accurately the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality. (Woolf, 1980:113)

“Life” that she calls “the oddest affair” gives shape to her novel, so merging the autobiographical influences with the essential structure of the novel based on fundamental binary oppositions such as “order and chaos, the eternal and the temporal” (McNichol, 1990:130) is unavoidable. The symbolic presentation of reality, or Woolf’s search for what she had hypothesised as real has been articulated within the frame of her own experiences.

Virginia Woolf adds quite many motifs to her novel from her life and from her thinking mind. As she puts it in her diary on May 28th, 1929: “Autobiography it might be called. How am I to make one lap, or act, between the coming of the moths, more intense than another, if there are only scenes?” (1980:229) But in her own wording, she does not “tell a story,” and she does not create “a Lavinia or a Penelope,” but “She.” Thus the gap between “the work” and “text” is narrow in that sense.¹ Woolf actually explains the textual nature of her work very openly. While stating “that becomes arty, Liberty greenery gallery somehow; symbolic in loose robes. Of course I can make her think backwards and forwards; I can tell stories. But that is not it” (230). Virginia Woolf impersonalises her own work.

Before she started to find a way of harmonising the existence of the impact of her personal experiences with her fictional creations, she was thoroughly embraced by her childhood memories in St. Ives: “... there was one external reason for the intensity of this first impression: the impression of the waves and the acorn on the blind ...” (Woolf, 1983:6) Her feeling close to the sea derived from her childhood associations with the sea at St. Ives. Almost half a century passed and she attempted to fictionalise the “moments of being” (McNichol, 1990:117). In *The Waves*, in an analytical and theoretical manner, she attempts to discover the ontology of meaning lying behind those moments which embody the essence of the whole process of her life. It is therefore not surprising for the Virginia Woolf reader to observe that the thematic and stylistic perspectives of Woolf establish a uniformal coexistence which stems basically from her understanding of the inexplicableness of reality that imposes differing traumas on each character in *The Waves*.

What makes one approach the text of *The Waves* from the structuralistic perspective is the symbolic and at the same time unifying urge towards wholeness. In the novel each individual exists as a separate and unique entity. But the characters in the novel achieve a wholeness of being only when they realise that they are bound to the other characters and their circumference. Each individual in the novel is comprehensible; their paradigmatic existence as being the variations of a unified whole clearly demonstrates a technically problematised mystery about their selfhoods. Each self is in search of a syntagmatic order which is displayed in their struggle to find a meaning for the mystery of reality and to establish an order through narrating their stories in their soliloquys.² Hence, the individuals

¹ Roland Barthes clarifies the distinction between “text” and “work” in his essay “From Work to Text” as “the work can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses), the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules); the work can be held in hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of discourse ...” (1977:157).

² Ferdinand de Saussure explains “syntagmatic and associative relations” in *Course in General Linguistics* as “[c]ombinations supported by linearity are *syntagms* ... In the syntagm a term acquires

insolvably fluctuate between the sense of crisis they embody in their entities and the motivation they feel to solve this crisis. No matter how overt this crisis is in the text, as Minow-Pinkney points out, "... self-identity is never fixed once and for all. It is a continuous intermixture, a dispersal and reassembly of diverse elements ... Woolfian 'personality' is never essentialist, though her work is often a quest for the essence of a character" (1987:157). Paradoxically enough, the modern quest for the stability of self is merged with the unattainability of the stabilisation of the essence of a character. Now it is clearer that to decipher the very structure of the novel, *The Waves*, and the complex web of the binary oppositions, one cannot help referring to the emotionally complicated experiences of Woolf. Although it seems quite contradictory to the impressionistic nature of the text and the scientific nature of structuralism, incorporating these experiences within the structuralistic perspective is helpful in observing the synchronic harmony between the symbols and the form and to highlight the binary oppositions in the text.

In *The Waves*, the characters exhibit a fluid existence just like waves, not much different from one another. Self is portrayed as fragment, but at the same time the symbol of moving waves unifies them all into a whole. All of the shattered identities of these characters interrelate. Self is problematised in terms of the symbolic language and defined in oppositional terms to other selves. But they do form a structuralistic unity. It is the psyche of the character and the impressions of Virginia Woolf that are projected in complex structures of language. According to Jack Stewart "Woolf expresses her own metaphysics of form in the protean image of waves revealing the depth to which the concept of form permeated the substance of her thought" (1982: 90).

Focusing on the narrative structure of the novel leads one to perceive the symbols in various forms. This kind of approach to the text recalls the symbol of waves in multiple forms. The consciousness of the six characters, three males, Bernard, Neville, Louis and three females, Rhoda, Susan, Jinny move in the wavelike rhythm as if they were one self. The characters live in their own

its value only because it stands in opposition to everything that precedes or follows it, or to both," while those "co-ordinations formed outside discourse" that are "not supported by linearity ... are a part of the inner storehouse that makes up language of each speaker. They are *associative relations*" (1974:123). The term *paradigms* is favoured over *associative relations*. These relations can be explained by means of an example. To form a grammatical sentence, one selects words according to certain rules and combines them by taking some other rules into consideration. Selection of words is made in accordance to paradigmatic rules and combing them to make sentence is made in accordance to syntagmatic rules. When this definition and explanation is applied to Virginia Woolf's novel, one can make an analogy between the existence of the six characters and the narrative target of the text; they are paradigmatically chosen by the writer to aim at highlighting their roles in the construction of the unified self in the novel. Each character's way of search for self-fulfilment is realised in a syntagmatic order, Woolf sets the rules for their search to find a meaning for the mystery of reality .

impressions, they do not exist as ordinary fictional characters. Each character narrates his/her own phases of life in his/her monologues, but the style they employ in their narration offers a “uniformity” (Ferrer, 1990:65). In this uniformity, the subjectivity of human experience mirrors a kind of self-definition that is shared by all the characters. This self-definition demonstrates that each of these characters, except Bernard, is in search of a fulfilment in different areas where they feel confident. Bernard realizes that he could exist as long as he writes, so he devotes himself to writing, Susan to her family, Jinny to her relationships with men, Louis to business, Neville to Percival’s (never existing in the text, but the most adored character by all others) memory after his death, but Rhoda, through which the problematic idea of self is most emphasised, defines her “self” in her facelessness. Bernard’s struggle to find his identity in the narration that he writes for others is an attempt of self fulfilment and is another unifying element in narration. He exists for what he is not. The outcome of this effort is his synchronising his narrative with the characters’ own experiences. The rest of the characters do not speak much about themselves in the process of their adulthood, but Bernard does this for others. He becomes multiple selves when he gives voice to this: “Am I all of them?” (228). He knows about them as long as he writes about them. Thus Bernard becomes the force which unifies the so-called subjectivity of the other five characters. The subjectivity of the characters does not indicate any originality about the uniqueness of their personalities, but technique-wise it is a necessary element to highlight the multiplicity of the idea of self elaborated in the novel. Virginia Woolf’s own reading of her book explains this multivocality of the novel: “I keep pegging away; and find it the most complex, and difficult of all my books. How to end, save by a tremendous discussion, in which every life shall have its voice – a mosaic – a ----- . I do not know” (1980:298). As Woolf states it, the writing of this novel was a “high pressure” for her (1980:298). These were her words when she was about to complete the work, but the beginning was as stressful as the process which was made clear at the end of the novel. In August 1930 Woolf had written 100 pages. She especially stresses the rhythmic quality of the novel: “The Waves is I think resolving itself into a series of dramatic soliloquies. The thing is to keep them running homogeneously in and out, in the rhythm of the waves. Can they be read consecutively? I know nothing about that ...” (1980:312) Actually the parts of the novel flowing in a rhythmic movement by virtue of the symbols they are enriched with, can be read consecutively.

In the beginning of each book, there are ten italicised sections the last of which is comprised of only one sentence. These italicised sections function as another means that serves for the structural unity. Woolf writes the italicised interludes in the rhythm of the waves, the rise and the fall of the waves and seasonal cycles are

enacted in the interludes. The poetic interludes trace the movement of the sun through the sky in the course of one day. This movement is parallel to the rise and fall of human life from childhood to old age. The lives of the six speakers as they pass from childhood to middle ages are likened to the cyclic changes of the sun and the wavy movements of the sea. So the synchronic fusion of the Interludes and monologues becomes rather poetic through the symbolism of the waves which supplies the novel with structural uniformity.

The italicised interludes also shed a light on the development of human consciousness in a rather poetic and symbolic manner. When read literally they just follow the path of the sun “pre-dawn to post-sunset” (Boon 1998:21) but the self-perception of the characters changes parallel to the movement of the sun. The first interlude starts with the sentence “*The sun had not yet risen,*” and the detailed description of the sea follows this. In the last paragraph the chirping of the birds can be likened to the short sentences uttered by the characters in their childhood. The credibility of the sophistication in the language they employ is quite weak. The idea of Elvedon, the imaginary world they created and sometimes assumed to live in, sounds very naïve. In this section reader is informed about their background, such as Bernard’s writerly adventurous attitude and Rhoda’s pessimistic mood about life: “I can think of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of hard contacts and collisions. I sail on alone under white cliffs. Oh!, but I sink, I fall!” (27). Her perception of herself is negative even at the very beginning, but Bernard’s seems to compensate for and balance Rhoda’s and all the other characters’ slippery and indecisive perspective of life. The nine episodes of the novel are related to one another in a rhythmical design, the design which imitates the movement of the waves sometimes from slow to fast, sometimes from fast to slow.

The symbols such as waves, fin, and ring do stimulate the structuralistic projection of form on the mélange of Woolfian impression and the characters’ problematic questioning of the idea of self. The synchronic functioning of the form and context through the symbols seems quite preoccupying, because symbols do not refer to only one thing, but they have various significations. Waves are naturally repetitive, which signifies the sameness of the self(s) in the novel. Each problematic psyche is in a struggle and in a dialogue with himself/herself. The connotation of waves is different for each character; in addition to that, stylistically the characters imagine themselves as waves, and in their soliloquys their accounts of their own lives sound wavelike. Therefore their speeches are wavy in tone: “‘They flick their tails right and left and left as I speak them,’ said Bernard. ‘They wag their tails; they flick their tails; they move through the air in flocks, now this way, now that way, moving all together, now dividing, now coming together.’”

(Woolf, 1978:20). A similar tone is observed in Jinny's speech, " 'Now the tide sinks. Now the trees come to earth; the brisk waves that slap my ribs rock more gently, and my heart rides at anchor, like a sailing-boat whose sails slide slowly down on to the deck. The game is over. We must go to tea now.'" (Woolf, 1978:46). So, they talk and act like waves. Wavelike rhythm is most visible in the italics of Woolf. "... *The wind rose. The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais, who whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep ...*" (75). In the next interlude, Woolf describes waves as "*They fell with a regular thud. They fell with the concussion of horses' hooves on the turf. ... They drew in and out with the energy, the muscularity of an engine which sweeps its force out and in again*" (108). The meaning of the waves is more thematic here. The personification is more on the foreground and the objects they are associated with such as lances, assegais, engines sweeping in and out and wild beasts are all phallic symbols. These symbols are "dangerous, brutal and destructive;" and they are "... specifically dangerous [in] the aspect of sexuality" (Maze, 1997:120). Woolf also makes a close affiliation between a monster living in the midst of waves and a fin "passing far out;" this creature is both "frightening & exciting." The following section of the novel starts with a dark description of the urbanity of London. So the waves is a part of "insensitive nature" (Woolf, 1980:285). London life, in other words city life is not fruitful either. For instance, Louis says,

The roar of London ... is round us. Motor-cars, vans, omnibusses pass and re-pass continuously. All are merged in one turning wheel of single sound. All separate sounds – wheels, bells, the cries of drunkards of merry-makers – are churned into one sound, steel blue circular. (Woolf, 1973:135)

Thus, the significations of the waves and the city life are synchronised. They both are insensitive to human beings and point to the meaninglessness of life. One of the most structurally interesting formulations of Woolf is her depiction of waves as muscular and London as maternal or female: "Not Rome herself looks more majestic. But we are aimed at her. Already her maternal somnolence is uneasy. Ridges fledged with houses rise from the mist. Factories, cathedrals, glass domes institutions and theatres erect themselves" (Woolf, 1973:111). Woolf here has a unifying aim: the waves and the city are so different from each other as one is an element of nature, the other is man made, and yet they are made to stand for the same mechanical and monotonous rhythm. Their similarity derives from their sound as well. The waves make similar sounds, and just like waves, all the objects in the city make the same sound for Louis. Like the sameness of the selves of the

characters, the sounds coming from various machines stress the monotony and the unique unchanging nature of the city.

As the representative of the modern man in search of an identity in the chaotic puzzle of the city life, Bernard in one of his soliloquys, makes it clear that “For myself, I have no aim, I have no ambition. ... I cannot remember my past, my nose or the colour of my eyes ... We insist, it seems, on living” (Woolf, 1973:113).

The originality in Woolf’s style is the ability to talk about the idea of the ordinariness, insensitivity and monotony of everyday life of the human beings living in the city centre by employing unusual symbols. Bernard continues to talk about the existence of the self: “There is no stability in this world. Who is to say what meaning there is in anything ... All is experiment and adventure. We are forever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities” (Woolf, 1973:118). In fact the waves described earlier is a means through which the situation of the modern man under the pressure of loneliness in the city life is described.

The connotations of waves vary from one character to another. For Rhoda, waves can only be associated with death. She perceives herself as selfless and searches for other probable selves in others’ identities: “Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of hard contacts and collisions. Oh, but I sink, I fall!” (Woolf, 1973:27). The reader does not see Rhoda in her daily routine due to her abstraction of life. She thinks deeply of her own selflessness. For Louis, the waves or the sea is not that dark and misty, it has a more positive connotation: “All the crudity, odds and ends, this and that, have been crushed like glass splinters into the blue, the red-fringed tide, which, drawing into the shore, fertile with innumerable fish, breaks at our feet” (Woolf, 1973:231). For both Bernard and Neville, the sea is affiliated with the abundance of words in literature which cannot be properly caught; in other words, the sea is as vast as words found in literary texts. Susan mentions water when she talks about the practical daily life. She welcomes water: “I go then to the cupboard, and take the damp bags of rich sultanas ... I let the cold water stream fanwise through my fingers ...” (Woolf, 1973:99).

The sea seems to be an integral part of the character’s life. The description of the waves in the interludes signals the change in their perception of life or maturity process. “Darkness” and “blackness” prevail, as can be seen in the last interlude: “*As if there were waves of darkness in the air, darkness moves on ... as waves of water wash round the sides of some sunken ship ... Darkness rolled its waves along grassy rides ...*” (237). However in the very first interlude the domineering colours brought by the waves were associated with brightness: “... *an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold ... The sun sharpened the walls of the house ...*” (8). The interludes in between the first and the last

interlude demonstrate how the word “waves” might turn into a destructive force. This is indicated as a gradual process which parallels the gradually complicated monologues of the characters. In each monologue one can observe each character’s struggle to reach stability; but their personalities are not ordinary, however the action they experience is. This ordinariness in their experience brings to mind structuralism’s challenging the longstanding belief that a work of literature reflects a given reality; a literary text is, rather, constituted of other texts. Ordinariness in action emphasises textuality of narrative. Parallel to this, Todorov’s structural assumption is worth quoting. The critic posits the idea that

The nature of structural analysis will be essentially theoretical and non-descriptive; in other words, the aim of such a study will never be the description of a concrete work. The work will be considered as the manifestation of an abstract structure, ... an understanding of that structure will be the real goal of structural analysis.(1986:328)

Therefore the work, in other words, the written form of the text is the projection of an “abstract structure;” in this case, the projection of an ordinariness in action and the experience of the characters in the novel. The indecisiveness and oscillation is in their minds and the highly questioning attitude of the characters, especially Rhoda’s and Bernard’s, is worth mentioning. To liken such self-interrogations to wavelike movements would not therefore be absurd. The signifier “wave,” in other words the sound-image, does lead to the concept of “wave,” but the sign that emerges as a consequence creates such a signification that in Woolf’s style the concept that the sound-image of “wave” leads to becomes multiplied, and the word “waves,” which is used by each character, brings to mind fluidity, but since the way they struggle differs from one another, the “waves” is symbolically shaped in various circumstances from death to life or from domesticity to creativity in the novel. So the whole text is structured around the binary signification of the symbol of waves.

The other symbol, which gives the novel structural uniformity, is the symbol of ring. Ring emerges in different forms and in different words such as circle, cycle, pool and chain. Ring stands for repetitiveness, monotony, but at the same time the continuation in nature and the tight unity of these characters. They are united around one person, Percival. Just like the image of waves, which goes beyond being a simple wave of water and supplies the text with a dominating idea, Percival is more than an admired friend who dies unexpectedly. Since the characters’ self-confidence throughout their lives does not grow healthily, they find inspiration in Percival. He does not appear in action. The six characters organise a farewell dinner for Percival and after his death there is another dinner where they reunite for Percival’s memory. These two dinners are again symbolic and they stand

paradoxically for the continuity in time and for the repetition in life. These two dinners “are the only extended scenes involving all six characters. At times they hear and address one another, thus introducing some dialogue into the narrative ...” (Dick, 2000:68). Structurally Percival is a significant entity. Before Percival dies it has already been stated that the circle they make is not firm any more. As Louis puts: “But now the circle breaks. Now the current flows. Now passions that lay in wait down there in the dark weeds which grow at the bottom rise and pound us with their waves” (142); and Rhoda continues, “The circle is destroyed. We are thrown asunder” (143). After Percival’s death, the ambiguity between sadness and happiness is still very strong even for Bernard. His son is born but still he is “upheld by pillars, shored up on either side with stark emotions; but which is sorrow, which is joy? I ask and I do not know ...”(153). Their growing up and their growing sense of self-awareness and self-recognition signal a frame and interestingly enough, Rhoda gives voice to this situation: “This is our dwelling place. The structure is now visible. Very little is left outside” (228). This statement also reveals the parallelism between the form of the text and the wording of the characters. This can be to some extent interpreted as self-awareness of the text. Similar to this textual self-awareness, another example is related to Rhoda’s death. She keeps repeating that she has no self, no significance in life, that “she is nobody” and has “no face.” Her self-esteem is quite low and in accordance with this, when Bernard announces her committing suicide, the consistency between the way the reader is informed about Rhoda’s death and her role in the book becomes more emphatic. At the end of the book when Bernard gives a summary about the characters, he makes some comments on how they approached life and death. In the narrative structure of the text, the last part is rather important. Bernard gathers the characters verbally: “... there’s Jinny. That’s Neville. That’s Louis in grey flannel ... That’s Rhoda ... It was Susan who cried ... I am myself not Neville ...” (240). In the last part, the life and death opposition suggests an essential component in the narrative, since the novel starts with their childhood narration. Life and death do not have any thematic significance , but they comprise the functioning of a final sequence in the narrative. Rhoda’s death is pronounced as if it was the death of just somebody: “... I went into the strand, and evoked to serve as opposite to myself the figure of Rhoda always so furtive, always with fear in her eyes, always seeking some pillar in the desert to find which she had gone; she had killed herself” (281). Throughout her life, Rhoda was timid and felt close to death and she could not cope with ordinary life and its reality. So the presentation of her death is consistent with the textual presentation of Rhoda’s perception and affiliation with the idea of death. In the narrative structure of the novel the functioning of the words as the elements of this structure is more on the foreground

than their meanings. Rhoda dies, but it has very little thematic significance, instead, her death becomes an element of Bernard's narrative.

As the characters grow older, the parallelism between the contents of the Interludes and the monologues get stronger. In fact the descriptive narrative in the Interludes embodies the universal and the very general situation in nature. The human beings in the novel are just a part of this firm structure strengthened by the sun and wave symbols. Bernard within the structuralist unity that becomes overt through the symbols exemplifies the attempt to establish a harmony to diminish the chaotic psychological situation of the characters. First he believes that he can accomplish this through writing stories about them, but later he cannot be "confident in his uniqueness" (Flint,1994:233): "I could make a dozen stories of what he said, of what she said ... But what are stories? ... And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories. What is my story? What is Rhoda's? What is Neville's? ..." (144). Later in the eighth part of the novel his obsession to tell stories continues, but the sun has sunk at the beginning of the section as parallel to the movement of the sun stated in the interlude of this part and he cannot feel the necessity of telling "true stories:" "Waves of hands, hesitations at street corners, someone dropping a cigarette into the gutter – all are stories. But which is the true story? That I do not know" (218). Bernard yearns to bring an order to the psychic chaos elaborated in the monologues of each character. Just to keep the structure of storytelling connected, and not to put an end to the stories that he has been collecting, he clarifies the purpose behind the formation of the text of the novel. He begins to explain the meaning of his life:

... to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story – there are so many, and so many – stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on; and none of them are true. ... How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases ... (238)

Few pages later, the problematised idea of self is explicitly discussed by Bernard. The characters' oneness is dissolved and turned into separate identities. As they grew old, what they liked and disliked is recounted more specifically: "Louis was disgusted by the nature of human flesh; Rhoda by our cruelty; Susan could not share; Neville wanted order; Jinny love; and so on. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies" (241). This is Bernard's observation, he cannot help continuing to tell stories, but he seems to reach self-integrity. Later in the novel, the definition of self becomes more emphatic when Bernard asserts that "I rose and walked – I, I, I; not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky, but I, Bernard, I even repeated my own name once or twice" (253). It is a rather slow and difficult process where

Bernard gradually and sometimes continually recognises his self-hood. He no longer associates himself with the men of literature he admires most, but he seems to believe that he exists in his own writing. Actually this recognition should not be attributed to Bernard solely but this is a modernist attempt which struggles to bring an order to chaos. The binary oppositions in the novel are gathered around the ability and inability of social, individual and psychic fulfilments. By virtue of his psychic self-fulfilment, he can differentiate ‘the Bernard’ observed by the others as “charming, but weak; the strong, but supercilious; the brilliant, but remorseless” (260) from ‘the Bernard’ that he himself appreciates: “What I was to myself was different; was none of these” (260) whether negative or positive at least he now can have an opinion of his own.

In the second section, “*the sun rose higher,*” the content is about their school days. Rhoda’s perception of her problematised self is on the foreground. Each speaks as if s/he was a grown up remembering his/her childhood, because the language is highly symbolic and poetic, the story does not attract our attention primarily but the meaning of the monologues and the intention of the speaker do. Louis is one of the writers of the six characters; his mind is fragmented too. As he explains “my shattered mind is pieced together by some sudden perception. I take the trees, the clouds, to be witnesses of my complete integration” (39). So, what maintains the unity of his self is time. As with Louis, the other characters’ time is not traditional or chronological, in their monologues there are many rememberings, but the time of the novel is. Fixing the momentary time does not bring a structural unity to the whole text, but like Woolfian “moments of being,” this attitude of the characters presents us with a fragmented puzzle to fix properly.

In the fifth section, first death and the first birth is reported. These are the death of Percival and the birth of Bernard’s son. And again as a structural parallel to this, the first sentence of the interlude of this section is “*The sun had risen to its full height*” (148). Percival’s death is a sort of climatic point because there will be no other idea around which all the six characters will be united and relied upon. In the sixth section they realise that they are old now; and in the interlude of this section, the sun sinks lower in the sky. In the next section this realisation continues when they meet at Hampton court for dinner, the sun is sinking in the interlude. The eighth section is composed of Bernard’s summary narrative which is based on his account of others’ likes and dislikes.

Throughout the text the characters are identified with the content of the narratives they themselves created, hence the novel as a text is the projection of subjective human experience and this projection is performed with symbolism and the working of binary oppositions based upon light/dark, life/death, hope/despair, order and chaos. In the composition of these binary oppositions the second seems

to overcome the first from time to time, but at the end of the novel the hope for order and sensitivity exists and even though the circle has already been broken, Bernard remains the embodiment of the textual structure: "Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away ... the pillar Rhoda saw ..." (289). With all these traces he carries upon his body, he is hopeful for light and the waves rise in him positively: "Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal ... And in me too the wave rises ... It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying ..." (296-297).

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