TRACING POSTMODERNISM IN VIRGINIA WOOLF`S
THE WAVES

VIRGINIA WOOLF`UN `DALGALAR` ADLI ROMANINDA
POSTMODERNİZMİN İZLERİ

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Abstract
Virginia Woolf is regarded as one of the leading British modernist novelists. Woolf, with her radical innovation and experimental styles, can also be acknowledged as the precursor of postmodernism. This paper aims to discuss Woolf`s the most challenging and innovative novel The Waves as a novel bearing postmodernist novel features although it is categorized as a modern novel. Woolf employs the very postmodernist techniques such as intertextuality, metafictionality and pastische. She rejects not only the established literary traditions of the earlier periods but also the socio-cultural values and sets out to come up with something novel to provide insights into the psychology of the characters to examine their reactions against the absence of stability, order, continuity and wholeness. Woolf exposes the voices of six characters, which calls into question the concepts such as unchangeable and timeless truth, objective reality and meaning. The Waves does not offer characters who are whole and knowable; rather, they are characterized by fragmentation, discontinuity, and multiplicity which are preferred in postmodern literature to the ideology of unity and continuity. The characters pursue an existential quest to be complete, whole, stable and solid but this quest results in failure and the characters have gained the postmodern awareness that self is not single, unique and unified but many, fluid and in constant process.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, The Waves, Postmodernism, Postmodernist Fiction, Multiplicity

Öz
Virginia Woolf modern İngiliz romancılarnın önde gelen isimlerinden biridir. Woolf roman türüne getirdiği radikal yenilikler ve deneysel tarzı ile postmodernizmin öncüsü olarak da kabul edilebilir. Bu çalışma Woolf`un en yeniilikçi ve karmaşık romanı olan ve modern roman olarak tarif edilen Dalgalar adlı romanını postmodern roman
Virginia Woolf as a Modern Novelist

Virginia Woolf is considered to be one of the cornerstones of the British modernist fiction especially for her mastery over the very modernist technique of stream of consciousness which enabled her to offer complex psychological insights into the characters in her works. Woolf was mainly concerned with the theory of how a modernist fiction should be. As she argued in her critical essay “Modern Fiction” in which she accused Edwardian writers of being materialist because of their concern with the body rather than the spirit, the modern writer has been liberated in the sense that s/he can choose what and how to write without an obligation to follow the literary traditions which are indeed enslaving for the writer. Life cannot be represented through the description of an outside world as realist writers did since “life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (Woolf, 2000: 741). Thus, Woolf suggests that modern writers should undertake the task of reflecting the life with sincerity by recording “the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (Woolf, 2000: 742). Woolf insists that “dark places of psychology” which has been ignored in Victorian fiction must be the very focus of modern novelists instead of action. Similarly, postmodern novel does not put the emphasis on the action (Hoffmann, 2005: 23) and consciousness and perception occupy a central place in a postmodern narrative in which perception fails to make sense of what is perceived (Hoffmann, 2005: 22, 23). Actions taken by the characters in a postmodern narrative function as the “parody of a quest” (Hoffmann, 2005: 23) which are futile and doomed to failure in a postmodern world.

Woolf adroitly observes and mirrors the inner worlds of her characters unlike the 19th century realistic Victorian novelists who focused on the very much detailed observation and depiction of the outer world. Being creative and innovative, she broke away with the strict mainstream rules of Victorian fiction writing and she experimented not only with the formal features of her fiction like plot structure, characterization, setting and style by challenging the previous strict perceptions of the genres but also with the way of presenting the psyches and the troublesome minds of her characters, revealing their unstable and sudden thoughts as they are passing through the minds of the characters.

Written in 1931, The Waves is Virginia Woolf’s the most experimental and therefore
challenging work both formally and thematically. The work has generally been recognized as a true embodiment of modernism, a representative of an avant-garde literature, due to the time period it was written and Woolf’s weaving of modernist elements of fiction within the very fabric of her experimental work including the stream of consciousness, an emphasis on the inner worlds of the characters and Woolf’s mixing of genres to create an innovative “playpoem” based on a combination of the qualities of lyric poetry and play.

Woolf as a Precursor of Postmodern Fiction

Woolf, who has made great contribution to modern fiction, also paved the way towards the postmodern literature as a precursor. The Waves can alternatively be read as a post-modernist work although it is a challenging task simply because it is hard to define what a postmodern fiction is due to a great diversity of different understanding, practices and principles since there is not one single and unified postmodernism. Postmodernism rejects any certain, fixed definitions, meanings and labels. As a term it appeared in the 1940s as a reaction against the modern movement in architecture. In literature it gained wide usage, recognition and popularity in the 1960s. In this article, the term postmodernism is not used as a historical label to refer to the novels produced in the second half of the 20th century. It is noteworthy that not all the novels written in the second half of the 20th century can be categorized as postmodern and some novels published as early as in the 18th century like Tristram Shandy have postmodern features. Umberto Eco suggests that “every period has its own postmodernism” (Eco, 1984: 67). Thus, this article employs the term postmodern to refer to certain aesthetic principles and stylistic practices. Self-reflexivity, intertextuality, metafictionality, critique of realist traditions are the most frequently employed and thus dominant features of postmodernist fiction although they are not exclusively defining features of postmodern fiction. The overlapping of the reality and fiction, mixing of genres, plurality, multiplicity, relativization, shallowness-depthlessness, the use of multiple narrative voices are also regarded as postmodern features. Postmodernism is also marked by the postmodern eclecticism in theme, the dissolution of the subject and the dissemination of meaning. Hoffmann states that postmodern fiction adopts pastiche, that is blank parody, and “irony as attitude and form” along with montage and collage, by foregrounding “both form (Sontag) and anti-form (Fiedler, Hassan) in a paradoxical process of exhaustion and replenishment” (2005: 43).

Woolf has achieved her literary ambition through postmodern playfulness which refers to “free play (Derrida) of the mind upon things, conventions and structures” and it favors multiplicity and heterogeneity (Hoffman, 2005: 26). On the other hand, Detweiler describes playfulness in terms of self-reflexivity of the novel which exposes its artificial and fictional status to the reader (1976: 51). Hoffmann maintains that the doubt characters feel concerning his own experience, outside world and his own art is the expression of self-reflexivity (2005: 25). Postmodern playfulness is liberating in the sense that it opens up a space to transgress and subvert both epistemological and ontological boundaries. The Waves, with deconstructive energy of playfulness, also does not recognize any literary conventions, cultural and social norms and breaks free of all established categories and boundaries. Derrida describes postmodern literature as a specific type of text without borderlines. Since every text opens itself to the other text, literature does not recognize any boundaries: “there is no essence of literature, no truth of literature, no literary being or being literary of literature” (1981: 223). Postmodern Woolf creatively eradicates the clear-
cut distinctions between different genres and literary discourses which have been kept separate since the Greek Literature. John Barth in his essay, “The Literature of Exhaustion” points out to the fact that all the forms of fiction have been already used up. There is an inevitable “exhaustion” of the previous versions of art, which encourages the postmodern writer to create something new via blending the old forms, styles and genres (1984: 62-76). In The Waves, likewise, Virginia Woolf creates something new and innovative by combining the literary forms of lyrical poetry with drama into fiction. She describes the parts which depict the outside world she inserts between the streams of consciousness of the characters as interludes and the characters’ flows of thoughts as soliloquies which are characterized by fragmentation, incoherence, discontinuity and fluidity. In the interludes written in a third-person narration, the reader is offered the description of the time passage and seasonal changes that take place in nature and the interludes are very poetic with the immense use of images and repetitions of sounds, phrases and sentence structures. What Woolf does is more than the insertion of dramatic and poetic qualities into the narrative of the fiction in which drama, poetry and fiction flow and merge into each other. She designs her novel as a patchwork and creates a very fruitful collage by stitching the inner consciousness to the external world, poetry to drama and past to the present, hope to desperation, fear to safety and birth to death. To do so, Woolf recurrently employs the same images and symbols both in the soliloquies and interludes.

Woolf is confused about the real nature of life: “Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions” (1954: 138). Woolf is engaged in an effort to construct an order to impose it on fragmented and disintegrated psyches, social relationships and the narrative structure, which turns out to be a futile attempt with no possibility of success since fragmentation is too deep to be repaired as Woolf manifests in her novel especially through Rhoda: “Nothing can settle: nothing can subside” (1992: 100). Bernard has also been frustrated by his futile search for form and shape for his true and complete story but the form is formlessness with no shape, truth or closure.

In The Waves it is possible to trace the pastiche of different genres including biography, autobiography, diary, drama, poetry, fiction. All the characters’ account of their lives and experiences from childhood to advanced age function as an autobiography and diary. Bernard is engaged in getting his biography to be written and speculates on a possible draft. As a result of blending of the existing forms in new combinations through such postmodern techniques as pastiche, intertextuality, collage and montage, the very status of authorship, originality and authenticity are accordingly diluted mainly because of the exhaustion of stylistic and literary practices. Bernard and Neville, several times in the novel, repeat that the British are “the continuers” (1992: 216), “the masters of tranquility and order”, and the “inheritors of proud tradition” (1992: 69). Thus they do not seek unique voice but follow the traditions. The voice of the author of a postmodern work cannot be truly heard among the other voices. This lack of originality for the writer is the greatest disappointment for Woolf’s mouthpiece Bernard who functions as the fictional writer in the novel: “I do not impersonate Catullus, whom I adore. I am the most slavish of students, with here a dictionary, there a notebook in which I enter curious uses of the past participle. But one cannot go on forever cutting these ancient inscriptions clearer with a knife” (1992: 88). Bernard, failing to discover his own unique voice to be a great writer, hopelessly imitates great names including Pope, Dryden, Byron and Shakespeare. At the end of the novel, Bernard gets rid of his modernist worry and nostalgia for the loss of originality and he eventually brings himself to the reconciliation with the postmodern celebration of the death of authenticity: “I like the
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copious, shapeless, warm, not so very clever, but extremely easy and rather coarse aspect of things” (1992: 206).

The Waves as a Postmodern Novel

Postmodernist Fiction does not see texts as organic unities, integrated structures or aesthetic wholeness. Postmodern plot is constructed as non-linear, non-casual and incoherent. Postmodern Woolf also abandons the sequential and mono-causal type of narration. The way Woolf organizes the plot reflects the working of human mind, thus discontinuous, non-casual and chaotic. Thus, Woolf does not see the plot as a unit systematically arranged and organized to create a unified whole with a certain beginning, middle and end. Instead, she makes use of an episodic plot structure in which the interior monologues of the six characters are intertwined and interlaced, which are embedded into the interludes. In her novel, unity and order are replaced by fragmentation. The flow of the thoughts of each character is discontinuous since each character’s stream of consciousness is cut and interrupted by that of other character. Similarly the parts which include the characters’ stream of consciousness are divided by the descriptive passages, each of which refers to different time of the day, year and human life, starting from the pre-dawn to night, childhood to old age and spring to winter.

Postmodernism which accepts life in all its forms insists on the multiplicity of perceptions and truths which are unfinished, unstable and open to revisions and modifications. Therefore, multi-voices, multi-truths, multi-selves, multiplicity in the very general sense, are the basic features of any postmodern writing. What Woolf offers is not “paradoxical union” as offered by Warner (1987: 109) but an enterprise to foreground multiplicity and plurality by embracing differences. In The Waves, “glittering, many-pointed and many-domed London” (1992: 91) provides a background setting for the characters first for their education and later for their reunion. The Waves is polyphonic and can be read as a heteroglassia since it offers multivalent positions by peopling the characters of different ethnicity, sexual preference, aptitude and different life philosophy. In the preface to Anti-Oedipus, Foucault suggests that: “prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic” (1984: xv). Virginia Woolf creates six different voices to function as a narrator in the story, whose multiple and alternative narrations are presented one after another with no clear indication for the transition from one narrator to another. In the inter-monologues of the six characters, instead of a unified perception of reality, the reader is exposed to the six versions of reality, each different from one another. Woolf creates varieties of the language to construct and represent the characters not only to distinguish them from each other but also to connect them to one another. Hence the subjectivities of the characters are established by plural, intersecting and dissecting discourses. Susan can be differentiated from the others by means of the signifiers closely associated with her devotion to nature, a rustic life such as a rabbit, leaves and a tree and her distrust of urban life and schooling. Rhoda and Louis are related to each other but distinguished from the others through the signifiers such as jungle and tiger. Rhoda is defined in terms of feelings of insecurity and fear, ship, fleet and paddle: “The door opens: the tiger leaps. The door opens: terror rushes in: terror upon terror, pursuing me […] A million arrows pierce me. […] Hide me, I cry, protect me, for I am the youngest, the most naked of you all” (1992: 85).

Postmodern fiction calls into question totalizing concepts including ‘reality’, ‘truth’,
'logic', and 'meaning'. According to Grenz: "there is no absolute truth [...] postmodern thinkers have given up Enlightenment quest for any one universal, supracultural, timeless truth. They focus instead on what is held to be true within a specific community" (1996: 8). The impossibility of attaining the absolute truth comes as an epiphany for the characters in *The Waves* when the characters are left with their own, varying, overlapping truths. Rhoda, from the very beginning of the novel, is more acutely aware of the absence of meaning: "Meaning has gone" (1992: 15). While Rhoda perceives the outside world as a jungle because of its cruelty and hostility, Jinny sees the society as welcoming and friendly. Jinny valorizes her physicality whereas Rhoda hates her body and bodily sensations and Susan establishes herself as a spiritual being, defying the material life. Similarly, Neville and Louis seek shelter in their lonely and secluded private worlds unlike the sociable Bernard who fails to establish an authentic self because of his over-dependency on the others for self-definition: "To be myself (I note) I need the illumination of other people’s eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is my self. The authentics, like Louis, like Rhoda, exist most completely in solitude. They resent illumination, reduplication" (1992: 95).

The pluralism of postmodernism in literature does not allow to come up with a defining principle for the characters in postmodern texts. Gass discusses that in postmodern fiction character does not disappear, as is often maintained, but rather is represented into multiple forms and functions. Thus, the variety in postmodern characterization proliferates. Gass suggests that "there are all kinds of characters, and characters of all kinds" (in Hoffmann, 2005: 21). Postmodern characters are "changeable", "unstable", "illusory", "made of fragments" (Federman, 1993: 44-45; Hoffmann, 2005: 20); they do not have a "fixed core" and an "indissoluble unique essence" with no unity (Hoffmann, 2005: 20). Similarly, Hochman explains that postmodern characters are double-coded, imitation and construction, which means they are both mental and linguistic constructs; on the other hand, they are assigned the properties of real life characters (1985: 117). Some characters are explicitly just a voice, others are just body. Some characters are reduced to intertextual references, others refer to real-world experiences outside the text. Some characters are utterly rootless. But characters who are conventionally assigned a house, a job, and parents abound as well. Fokkema draws attention to a great variety in characterization in postmodern works. Many postmodern characters are "incoherent or illogical", but some do not disintegrate at all. This variety in characterization can be observed in the same novel. "For instance, one character is endowed with psychological motivation and a reflecting consciousness, whereas the others are only constituted purely textually" (Fokkema, 1991: 181-182).

Woolf’s characters in the novel also appear “too heterogeneous for systematization” (Fokkema, 1991: 181). Each of the seven characters of *The Waves* represents this multiplicity: Louis with his different ethnical background; Neville with his homosexual tendency and his dissatisfaction with his unattractive and disgraceful body, which arouses disgust in him, Jinny, through her preoccupation with the satisfaction of her physical drives and appetites; Bernard through his obsession with writing; Rhoda with the dissolution of body and soul, and Susan with her dissatisfaction with modern, industrial and urban way of life and her attachment to nature. While Percival is reduced to textual existence, Rhoda is reduced to the inner voice without a stable and consistent identity. Louis is rootless while Bernard and Susan are created as real-life characters with a family, house and job. Bernard draws attention to their "eternal flux" (1992: 208) since they constantly "flow and change" (1992: 210): “I changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelly, was the hero, whose name I now forget, of novel by
Dostoevsky; was for a whole term, incredibly, Napoleon; but was Byron chiefly” (1992: 208).

Since postmodern literature celebrates multiplicity and plurality, alternative subject positions, formerly marginalized and otherized identities because of their class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and genders are foregrounded and made visible in postmodernist fiction although their experiences were previously regarded as unthinkable and unspeakable. This function of postmodern novel truly manifests itself within The Waves, which gives voice to a homosexual character Neville and an Australian character Louis. Louis is depicted as the marginalized “other” of the society full of “hard thoughts, this envy, this bitterness” (1992: 71). He identifies himself with wild animals because of his subaltern identity: “I see wild birds, and impulses wilder than the wildest birds strike from my wild heart. My eyes are wild; my lips tight pressed. The bird flies; the flower dances; but I hear always the sullen thud of the waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps” (1992: 58). He feels himself at a disadvantage and his life and future have been sealed because of his low class, ethnic identity and his “unenviable body” (1992: 41). His Australian accent especially is the main point that pushes him to the periphery: “They laugh at my neatness, at my Australian accent. I will now try to imitate softly lisping Latin. [...] It would have been happier to have been born without a destiny, like Susan, like Percival, whom I most admire” (1992: 14, 201). Louis, with an acute lack of sense of belonging, connectedness and homelessness, is desperately in need of a stable identity, recognition and acceptance: “I am not included. If I speak, imitating their accent, they prick their ears, waiting for me to speak again, in order that they may place me — if I come from Canada or Australia, I, who desire above all things to be taken to the arms with love, am alien, external” (1992: 94). Louis functions as a postcolonial agent and his background makes him overambitious and competitive, constantly comparing and contrasting himself with Neville and Bernard who have access to more social opportunities and so achieve better in life than Louis although he thinks he is the best scholar among them. He inevitably envies the idealized character Percival and admires the British for their discipline, unity and stability: “Blessings be on all traditions, on all safeguards and circumscriptions! I am most grateful to you men in black gowns, and you, dead, for your leading, for your guardianship” (1992: 58). Louis, “unhappy, unfriended in exile” (1992: 204), suffers from a sense of rootlessness and to make up for this lack, he identifies himself with the Nile and the tree whose roots go down deeply into the earth:

My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me and the weight of earth is pressed on my ribs. Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. (1992: 9)

Since he fails to find any attachments and connections neither in Australia nor in England, Louis looks for his origin in the history of mankind. Although he has achieved success in his business career, he never feels included and integrated into the cultural and social life in England and his quest for a genuine Louis-self remains unaccomplished and unfulfilled.

Postmodern fiction is marked by a shift of concern from epistemological to onto-
logical ones. The Waves are concerned with the exploration of different ontologies. Postmodernism and poststructuralism recognize the uncertainty, opacity and unknowability of the self, not only to others but also to the own self because of mobility and fluidity (Hoffman, 2005: 454). Bernard possesses many selves: “There are many rooms – many Bernards. There was the charming, but weak; the strong, but supercilious; the brilliant, but remorseless; the very good fellow, but, I make no doubt, the awful bore; the sympathetic, but cold; the shabby, but – go into the next room – the foopish, worldly, and too well-dressed” (1992: 217). Bernard is not “one and simple, but complex and many”: “in public, bubbles; in private, is secretive. They do not understand that I have to effect different transitions; have to cover the entrances and exists of several different men who alternate their parts as Bernard” (1992: 61). Susan also feels this multiplicity of the self deeply: “I am not a woman […] I am the seasons, I think sometimes, January, May, November; the mud, the mist, the dawn. I cannot be tossed about, or float gently, or mix with other people” (1992: 79).

Cixous celebrates the dispersed character who possesses multiple selves “multiple, centred, differentiated into a trans-subjective effervescence” (1974: 387.). Woolf’s characters are dissolved into multiple and discontinuous beings with their fragile and fragmented subject positions, replacing the unified, coherent, and ‘old stable ego’: “We grew; we changed; for of course, we are animals. […] We exist not only separately but in undifferentiated blobs of matter (1992: 205). Bernard points out to the fluidity of the identities several times in the novel: “But when we sit together, close,’ said Bernard, ‘we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory.” (1992: 16). The characters in The Waves cannot easily be distinguished from each other since they do not have distinctive features: “confused, featureless, or changed their features so fast that they seemed to have none […] Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole” (1992: 212, 214). Postmodern characters are not represented in terms of uniqueness, authenticity or stable core. Bernard suffers from an ontological crisis when he fails to identify himself as a separate, different individual: “And now I ask, ‘Who am I?’ I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt “I am you” (1992: 240-241). Bernard is disturbed by the impossibility of achieving unity and wholeness to be a complete human being: “Faces recur, faces and faces – they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble — Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole” (1992: 256). He comes to the realization that he does not consist of one single self but he is many-sided with different selves in him with multiple stories of the self: “I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other […] I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple […] this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny, or Rhoda – so strange is the contact of one with another” (1992: 72, 234). Bernard finally gives up celebrating a stable core and a unified self and no longer laments the dissolution of the self into multiple and flexible being: “what I call “my life”, it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am — Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs” (1992: 230).

Woolf’s characters experience complex existential ordeals and conflicts, and their
quest to find their selves results in failure and frustration. Ontological instability and indeterminacy, especially in Bernard and Rhoda, reflects a postmodern character. Bernard, as an aged man, begins “to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now” (1992: 240). Life is all about “unaccomplishment and separation”, “imperfect, an unfinished phrase” (1992: 236). Rhoda perceives herself as “nobody”, robbed of identity with “no face” (1992: 33). Identity failed her. “ ‘That is my face,’ said Rhoda, ‘in the looking-glass behind Susan’s shoulder [...] for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world [...] whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second.’ ” (1992: 3). Rhoda cannot help feeling as if she were falling and sinking down into nothingness, being “blown like a feather” (1992: 50) without an ability to bring her disintegrated soul and body together. She can exert no control over her body or her surroundings. She even fails to make herself cross the puddle and gets drifted like a feather (1992: 64). Rhoda, unable to deal with her fragmented self, is desperately in need of wholeness: “I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join — so — and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, “Oh save me, from being blown forever outside the loop of time!” “ (1992: 21). Her failures, frustration, anxiety, fear and unresolved conflicts cause her to develop psychosis. She is now incapable of self-management, completely losing her contact with the reality, which leads her to suicide. Similarly, Bernard feels he has been reduced to a shadow “without a self, weightless and visionless, through a world weightless, without illusion?” (1992: 238).

Postmodern literature focuses on the chaotic atmosphere of the characters’ worlds, reflecting a disordered way of life. Rhoda is full of fear and hatred for her own self, life and people: “ ‘Oh, life, how I have dreaded you,’ said Rhoda, ‘oh, human beings, how I have hated you! How you have nudged, how you have interrupted, how hideous you have looked in Oxford Street’ (1992: 203). Susan and Bernard are concerned with this chaotic life as well. Bernard also feels surrounded by “disorder, sordidness and corruption” (1992: 244), which makes life “utterly disgusting” (1992: 244). Woolf’s characters are motivated by the possibility of order, stability, coherence and wholeness. Neville is very much obsessed with this idea: “there is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world” (1992: 15). However, this belief and hope in the existence of stability and order of the time turns out to be an illusion as Bernard clearly puts in his soliloquy at the end of the novel: “The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, hardness, weight, depth, is completed. This, for the moment, seems to be my life. If it were possible, I would hand it to you entirely [...] Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story” (1992: 210).

The basic tenant for postmodernism is the eradication of the meta-narratives. Instead of being unified around a universal fixated meta-narratives which are grand stories which give shape to the western discourses of modern religion, science, philosophy and politics and which impose the concepts including absolute truth, totality and universality, each character is depicted in their mini-narratives with their own multiple truths. Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (1984: xxiv). He maintains that postmodern prefers little narratives that offer a limited truth applicable only to a particular situation to metanarratives. Narratives are always “partial, selective and rhetorical” (Nicol, 2009: 12). Percival is distinguished from the other characters in the sense that he is the embodiment of what grand narratives stand
for, that is reason, stability, coherence, completeness, perfection, truth, center and progress. Percival arouses admiration in all these 6 characters. Louis esteems his magnificence (1992: 28). Percival is the source of inspiration for Louis: “it is Percival I need; for it is Percival who inspires poetry” (1992: 30). Bernard sees him as a leader to be followed (1992: 125). It is Percival who unites, gives order and meaning to things, solves the problems, brings peace and comfort: “‘Now,’ said Neville, ‘my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. Knives cut again’” (1992: 122). Louis considers his death as fissure: “Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster?” (1992: 94). Percival is the only character who is muted since his inner consciousness is not revealed to the reader. He is not only inaccessible to the reader but also to the other characters in the novel. Neville draws attention to Percival’s “inexpressive eyes” (1992: 27) which see nothing: “He is remote from us all in a pagan universe” (1992: 27). He seems to have a privileged status. However, his unheroic death in India by falling down off the horse can be regarded as a postmodern irony: “He fell. His horse tripped. He was thrown” (1992: 124). His death can be taken as the death of metanarratives as a legitimating and empowering force and as a clear indication of Woolf’s postmodern rejection of the ideals he represents.

The very postmodern concept intertextuality is coined by Julia Kristeva, who suggests “[A]ny text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (1986: 37). Intertextuality puts each text in relation to another. For Anton Pokrivčak, “The most obvious techniques to build intertextual networks of literary texts include direct reference, allusion, quotation, echo, plagiarism, collage, mosaics, palimpsest, and others” (quoted in Kusnir 33). The intertextuality in The Waves is achieved through the allusion to Greek and Latin writers such as Plato, Virgil, Lucretius, Horace and Catullus as well as English writers including Tennyson, Keats, Mathew Arnold, Pope, Dryden and Shakespeare. Rhoda makes constant references to Shelley’s poem ‘The Question’: “Wild roses and ivy serpentine” “Oh! To Whom...”. The lines from Shakespeare’s sonnets, Twelfth Night (1992: 236), King Lear (217), Cymbeline (10) are quoted by several characters including Susan (10), (217). In The Waves along with Bernard as a story writer, Neville also makes direct references to literary personages: “When I read Shakespeare or Catullus, lying in the long grass, he (Percival) understands more than Louis. Not the words- but are the words? Do I not know how to rhyme, how to imitate Pope, Dryden, even Shakespeare?” (1992: 37). Neville imitates neoclassical writers Dryden and Pope to achieve their level of perfection. Bernard constantly identifies himself with Byron who provides literary inspiration for writing mostly because of his restlessness, quest and his devotion to romantic love: “Who am I thinking of? Byron of course. I am, in some ways, like Byron. Perhaps a sip of Byron will help to put me in the vein” (1992: 79).

Postmodern fiction is self-conscious about language and processes of narration. This postmodern feature, metafictionality, can be seen in The Waves. Metafiction draws attention to its own fictionality, constructedness and creation process. Metafiction is described by Patricia Waugh as:

a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictitiousness of the world outside the
In metafiction, generally writer-characters are created. *The Waves* reflects the writing quests of Bernard, Neville and Louis. Bernard, from the very beginning, is obsessed with “phrases” to be put together in his masterpiece. He is engaged in telling stories to his friends at school in the earlier chapters of the novel. In the college he is struggling hard to write something as great and influential as those of Shakespeare or Catullus. However, like the stories he tells his friends, his writings can never be brought to the completion. We, as readers, observe and witness the processes of his writing along with the difficulties and problems he is faced with as a writer. He suffers from writer’s block. He has constantly created stories and he filled countless notebooks with phrases to be used with a hope that one day in the future he will find the true story: “the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories?” (1992: 156). Bernard is concerned with the accurate representation of life in his art but he has been frustrated by his futile search for form and shape for his true and complete story since the form is formlessness with no shape, truth or closure. His obsession with language, phrases and writing is actually nothing more than his search for his identity. He looks for an identity that is concrete and stable via the process of writing: “I, carrying a notebook, making phrases, had recorded mere changes; a shadow. I had been sedulous to take note of shadows. How can I proceed now, I said, without a self, weightless and visionless, through a world weightless, without illusion?” (1992: 285). Bernard functions as a narratorial voice in the last part of the novel where the other characters fall into silence and it is Bernard who wraps up the distinct and fragmentary stories of the six characters and speaks on behalf of all the other characters.

The capacity of language to represent the world is called into question in postmodern literature. Bernard, “a natural coiner of words, a blower of bubbles through one thing and another” (1992: 94) tries hard to represent the world and human experiences through the language. However, his overdependence on language fails him because he discovers that language does not suffice to represent the world; “I draw the veil off things with words, how much, how infinitely more than I can say, I have observed. More and more bubbles into my mind as I talk, images and images” (1992: 68). Language has an independent existence and can work independently of the world. Bernard comes to the realization that the world and experience he depicts through the language are divorced from the real world. Bernard’s failure to produce stories can be taken as the triumph of poststructuralism:

In order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story – and 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 that come down beautifully [...] how I distrust neat de-
signs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words [...] words of one syllable such as children speak [...] I need no words. Nothing neat. [...] I have done with phrases. (1992: 199)

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Both modernism and postmodernism express strong dissatisfaction with Victorian realism. Postmodern fiction deliberately subverts realist narrative conventions with magic realism. Woolf did not reject or exclude realism but she embedded it into the plurality of the discourse she created. What Woolf offers is not “a realist representation of objective social totality” (Baker, 2000: 26) of course, but she reflects the subjectively perceived realism as received by the minds of the characters. Literary realism is associated with chronology and totality. In The Waves, the literary realism is blurred by a relativized depiction, uncertainty, and overlaying narrative voices of the six of the characters. The narration of Rhoda blends dreams and the reality. “All my ships are white,” said Rhoda. “I do not want red petals of hollyhocks or geranium. I want white petals that float when I tip the basin up. I have a fleet now swimming from shore to shore. I will drop a twig in as a raft for a drowning sailor. I will drop a stone in and see bubbles rise from the depths of the sea.” (1992: 18). In a postmodern literary work, a representation of “reality often overlaps with fiction, fantasy, dreams and sometimes hallucinations” and often it is challenging to separate these circles from one another (Kusnir 40). Rhoda all through the fiction is torn between her fantasies and the harsh reality of the outer world. She finds the easement in blurring the reality with her fantasies and she seeks confidence and security away from the detrimental world outside in the dreams and fantasies. Rhoda imagines herself as the mistress of her imaginary ships and sails freely wherever she would like to. Jameson equates postmodern condition with mental disorder. A postmodern character fails in the practice of ordinary existence and may get out of control. Rhoda is a good example for this failure which results in her mental disturbance.

Shallowness and depthlessness the postmodern literary works are concerned with predominates The Waves as well through Jinny’s obsession with her body and Susan’s references to and critique of modern way of life. For Frederic Jameson, the surface is “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense—perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms” (2003: 3). Jinny in this sense can be perceived as the character who is the embodiment of this depthlessness and shallowness. She valorizes her material body which never stops to “move and dance” (1992: 32) instead of soul and intellect: “I hate the small looking-glass on the stairs [...] It shows our heads only: it cuts off our heads. And my lips are two wide, and my eyes are too close together” (1992: 31). Woolf portrays Jinny as a character who is fixated on her physicality: “My body lives a life of its own [...] There is then a great society of bodies, and mine is introduced [...] Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world. My imagination is the bodies. I can imagine nothing beyond the circle cast by my body [...] My body goes before me, like a lantern down a dark lane, bringing one thing after another out of darkness into a ring of light” (1992: 63, 101, 129). She judges people she meets by their physical appearances. As she is obsessed
with bodily sensations, she tries to make use of her feminine beauty and charm to release her sexual energy, especially when she is in the presence of male gaze: "one man will single me out and will tell me what he has told no other person. He will like me better than Susan or Rhoda" (1992: 43). That is the reason why she always favors parties and hates darkness and loneliness.

Susan functions as the antithesis of Jinny when she offers a critique of the superficial and artificial way of modern society she is living in. The society, which she is usually complaining about in The Waves, can also be closely associated with the values of the postmodern world, too. In the novel, she functions as the epitome of the Victorian values and mindset of the 19th century as she, as a woman, always favors nature and domesticity; therefore, she criticizes a depthless life:

I will not send my children school nor spend a night all my life in London. Here in this vast station everything echoes and booms hollowly. The light is like the yellow light under an awning. Jinny takes her dog for a walk on these asphalt pavements. People here shoot through the streets silently. They look at nothing but shop-windows. Their heads bob up and down all about the same heights. The streets are lace together with telegraph wires. The houses are glass, all festoons, and glitter: now all front doors and lace curtains, all pillars and white steps. (1992: 37)

People live in isolation and are totally away from sincerity, interaction and warmth. The modern or postmodern subject portrayed and criticized by Susan is nothing more than the function of the lifeless models or dummies on the shop windows. The postmodern subject, now, turned out to be isolated and alienated from the society, which caused him/her to leave away the depth and to live on the surface. Louis and Neville avoid human company and attachments. Louis feels as if he hangs "suspended without attachments. We are nowhere [...] I have no firm ground to which I go" (1992: 51). Bernard states that both Louis and Neville "sit silent. Both are absorbed. Both feel the presence of other people as a separating wall. But I find myself in company with other people" (1992: 53).

To conclude, The Waves can be labeled as a pre-postmodern fictional work that prepares the ground for the upcoming postmodern works. Postmodernism is accepted as "a revolutionary explosion of the arts because of its openness to new possibilities and diversities, and its willingness to experiment, rethink, and redefine" (Howard 267; Hoffmann, 2005: 34). By employing postmodern aesthetic Woolf seeks "liberation" from exhausted traditions of fiction writing. Woolf’s postmodern aesthetics can be characterized by her rejection of old rigid forms to explore novel alternatives and her celebration of innovation and experimentation.

REFERENCES


