

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
HammaLakhdar University of El-Oued
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Department of English Language



The Quest for Meaning in Life in 20th-Century British Novels: A Stylistic Analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

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Submitted by:

Djebali Hana

Supervised by:

Dr. Mega Afaf

RouihaFarid

Dr.KaddouriSouad

President

University of El-Oued

Dr. Mega Afaf

Supervisor

University of El-Oued

Mr. Dida Nassireddine

Examiner

University of El-Oued

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Dedication 01

I thank Allah the Almighty for giving me the strength and patience to accomplish this work.

I dedicate this work to my dear parents. I could not have done this without their unwavering belief in me, their support, and encouragement. I thank them for teaching me to believe in God, myself, and my dreams.

To my sisters, who helped me overcome many obstacles and hardships, and to my sweet nephews.

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members of our department for their support.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the theme of the quest for meaning in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* through a stylistic analysis. The aim of this research is to explore the stylistic features Woolf employed to convey her theme. The study adopts a descriptive analytical method, applying Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short's literary stylistic approach. The primary data for the analysis comes from Woolf's *The Waves*, which serves as the foundation for examining Woolf's narrative techniques and their impact on the thematic depth of the novel. The dissertation consists of three chapters: the first provides a theoretical overview of the historical background of modernism in 20th-century British literature; the second presents Leech and Short's approach as outlined in *Style in Fiction*; and the third chapter offers a practical analysis, including a summary of the novel, its themes, literary devices, and character analysis. The study concludes that *The Waves* offers a profound exploration of the quest for meaning in life through the complex lives of its six main characters.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, Leech and Short approach, stream of consciousness, modernism, stylistic analysis, quest for meaning in life.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Background of the Study

At the beginning of a new century, ideas and thoughts often undergo significant changes. As a result, people tend to reject past traditions and ways of thinking to adapt to modern life. In the early 20th century, Britain experienced a period of transformation, particularly in science, which shifted towards experimentation, moving away from divination and magic. This era saw Britain transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, with people's livelihoods increasingly tied to diverse trades. The century was also marked by national fortune and power, despite the enormous losses of life and property during the First and Second World Wars. The First World War, in particular, dealt a significant blow to the British Empire. During this time, philosophical theories like Karl Marx and Engels' scientific socialism, Darwin's theory of evolution, Einstein's theory of relativity, and Freud's analytical psychology rose to prominence and deeply influenced modernist thought.

In the aftermath of World War I, modernism emerged as a historical and philosophical movement in early 20th-century English literature. This movement responded to the changing ideas and perspectives of the time. American writers Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were instrumental in introducing modernism, with their works inspiring other writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Eliot himself. These writers sought new techniques to convey their thoughts, using highly personal styles and modern literary maxims that set their work apart from earlier literature. Modernism broke from 19th-century conventions, emphasizing individual experience and incorporating symbolism, expressionism, surrealism, futurism, imagism, and stream of consciousness. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are credited with creating the stream of consciousness technique, which reflects the inner workings of a character's mind in a continuous flow of thoughts. Virginia Woolf, a key figure in modernist

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literature, developed her own style, using innovative language to explore her characters' inner conflicts and psychological experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The theme of the search for meaning in life is a central topic in modern literature, often approached differently by various modernist writers. Virginia Woolf, in particular, employs multiple literary devices to convey her ideas about spiritual disruption, self-awareness, and identity. In her novel *The Waves*, Woolf addresses the quest for meaning in life using stylistic techniques that engage the reader's interest in this existential theme.

Research Questions

This investigation addresses the following key questions:

- How does Virginia Woolf utilize stylistic devices to express the existential pursuit of meaning in *The Waves*?
- What is the relationship between the quest for meaning in life and the concept of identity in the novel?

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on Woolf's *The Waves*, examining various themes such as the self, stream of consciousness, relationships, and the characters' emotions. Louis Prosky (2010) concluded that Woolf's concept of the self is elusive. Levy (2003) argued that Woolf's use of stream of consciousness was a revolutionary technique suited to the modernist era. Fleming (2000) recognized Woolf as a pioneer in writing essays on literary history and the politics of power. Sergma (2018) explored the presentation of the self in *The Waves*, analyzing the lives of the characters and their internal reflections on human reality. Boussaid (2017)

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focused on Woolf's use of dramatic soliloquies in her fiction. Overall, previous studies have emphasized the literary and historical significance of *The Waves*. This study will focus on examining some of the key stylistic and literary devices used by Woolf.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to explore Virginia Woolf's distinctive style in *The Waves*, particularly her use of literary techniques that were prominent in 20th-century British literature, such as stream of consciousness, symbolism, imagery, and lyrical language. Through these techniques, Woolf investigates the complexities of human existence and the elusive nature of meaning. By following the characters' interconnected stories, Woolf addresses essential issues such as identity, the search for meaning, and the passage of time, prompting readers to reflect on the spiritual journey and the quest for purpose in a chaotic world.

Significance of the Study

Virginia Woolf is considered one of the greatest writers in English literature, renowned for her captivating prose and her role as a central figure in modernist literature. This study encourages students of literature to engage with *The Waves* and explore its poetic discourse, which exemplifies the features of modernity in British literature. Woolf's work continues to attract readers with its rich exploration of identity, meaning, and human experience.

Research Methodology

This dissertation employs both qualitative and descriptive analytical methods. The qualitative method is used in Chapters 1 and 2, drawing on various sources such as dissertations, books, and articles related to 20th-century British literature and its thematic concerns. In Chapter 3, the descriptive analytical method is applied, utilizing Geoffrey Leech

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and Mick Short's literary stylistic approach to analyze the stylistic devices that Woolf employs in her work. The methodology involves multiple readings of *The Waves* and an analysis of the stylistic devices Woolf uses to convey her themes, leading to conclusions based on these findings.

Research Structure

This dissertation is structured into three chapters: two theoretical and one practical. The first chapter, titled "Britain in the 20th Century," explores Britain's political, cultural, economic, and scientific developments during this period. It also discusses the emergence of modernism in British literature, highlighting its features, historical background, and prominent writers like Virginia Woolf. The second chapter discusses the literary stylistic approach of Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, which is used as the framework for analyzing Woolf's work. Finally, the third chapter, titled "Stylistic Analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*," provides a biography of Virginia Woolf, a plot summary, and a detailed stylistic analysis of *The Waves*.

**ChapterOne:
Britain in the 20th Century**

Introduction

The early twentieth century marked a significant period of transformation in Britain, characterized by profound changes across political, cultural, economic, and scientific realms. As the nation emerged from the devastation of World War I, it faced the challenges of modernity, prompting a re-evaluation of traditional values and social structures. This chapter explores the complex situation of Britain during this tumultuous time, focusing on the multifaceted influences that shaped British literature and modernist thought. The political landscape was dominated by the rise of the Labour Party and the reformation of the Conservative Party, reflecting the shifting sentiments of a population yearning for social change and economic security. The aftermath of the wars led to a cultural renaissance, as artists and writers sought to capture the essence of human experience in a rapidly changing world. Concurrently, Britain's economy transitioned from industrial strength to grappling with the consequences of a global economic shift, which, while fostering new opportunities, also highlighted stark inequalities.

In literature, these societal transformations fuelled the modernist movement, which sought to challenge conventional narratives and explore the complexities of identity, consciousness, and existence. Key figures such as Virginia Woolf emerged during this period, utilizing innovative narrative techniques to articulate the struggles of individuals navigating a fragmented reality. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Britain's situation in the twentieth century, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of modernist literature and its critical engagement with the quest for meaning in life.

1.1. The Situation of Britain in the 20th Century

1.1.1. Politics

In the United Kingdom, two major political parties have historically dominated the political landscape: the Conservative Party and the Labour Party.

The **Conservative Party** is rooted in principles that emphasize private property, entrepreneurship, a robust military, and the preservation of traditional cultural values and institutions. Since the end of World War I, the Conservative Party, alongside its primary opponent, the Labour Party, has played a pivotal role in British politics. A notable event occurred in December 1923 when Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin called a surprise election. This election briefly united the fragmented Liberal Party and resulted in a minority Labour administration. Despite this shift, the Conservatives retained their status as the largest party until 1945, adopting a strategy of "new conservatism" aimed at appealing to the burgeoning middle class.

Winston Churchill, a key figure within the Conservative Party, formed a coalition government with the Labour Party during the war but ultimately lost the 1945 election. The defeat was attributed to the electorate's growing desire for social transformation and economic security in the wake of the war. In opposition, the Conservative Party undertook significant restructuring of its policies and organizational framework, including the establishment of a new youth movement and an educational branch designed to engage younger voters (Wilson, 2010).

The **Labour Party**, on the other hand, has historical ties to trade unions and advocates for an active role of the state in fostering economic development and providing essential social services. Since its inception in the early twentieth century, the Labour Party has positioned itself as Britain's principal democratic socialist party, actively opposing the Conservative Party. It was founded to address the dissatisfaction of the working class, particularly concerning the Liberal Party's inability to adequately represent their interests in Parliament. The party's early successes can be attributed to internal factional conflicts, the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, and the transformation of the Labour Party into a genuinely socialist organization.

Labour's policy framework, known as "Labour and the New Social Order," called for full employment, democratic governance, progressive taxation, and an expansion of educational and social services. By 1922, the Labour Party had overtaken the Liberal Party as the official opposition to the ruling Conservatives. The establishment of the first Labour government in 1924 under James Ramsay MacDonald marked a significant milestone, though his minority administration faced challenges due to fears regarding the influence of the Soviet state and the specter of communism. The Labour Party remained out of power until 1940, when its ministers joined Winston Churchill's wartime coalition government. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Clement Attlee, the Labour administration utilized wartime interventions to cultivate a post-war political consensus centered on a mixed economy, social welfare, and full employment (Wilson, 2010).

1.1.2.Culture

In the early 20th century, theatre in London was a vibrant cultural hub, particularly for the upper and middle classes who could afford the luxury of attending performances. The grand venues, especially those on the West End, provided an opportunity for patrons to immerse

themselves in beautifully crafted settings. Ladies adorned in elegant evening gowns and gentlemen in fine attire gathered to witness theatrical productions that often blended entertainment with social commentary. Audiences could enjoy Shakespearean comedies, where strikingly realistic sets drew applause as the curtains rose, or venture into the whimsical world of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), a testament to the era's imaginative storytelling.

While these performances frequently offered moments of reflection, the predominant focus remained on entertainment and spectacle. George Bernard Shaw, a prominent playwright of the time, contributed significantly to this cultural landscape. His works, penned during the late 1890s and early 1900s, provoked, amused, and sometimes shocked audiences. Shaw's repertoire was diverse, encompassing social dramas like *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), to Edwardian classics such as *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Pygmalion* (1914), culminating in post-war masterpieces like *Saint Joan* (1924).

Shaw's theatrical philosophy echoed that of Henrik Ibsen, who he admired for his incisive approach: "Ibsen substituted a terrible art of sharp-shooting at the audience, trapping them, fencing with them, and aiming always at the sorest spot in their consciences." Shaw's first collection, *Plays Unpleasant* (1898), tackled 'unpleasant' subjects such as prostitution, profiteering, and infidelity. He held a firm belief that theatre should serve a serious purpose—provoking thought and challenging societal norms. In the context of Edwardian Britain, where such themes were often overlooked, Shaw's willingness to confront uncomfortable truths distinguished his work. While he infused humor into his characters—much like Charles Dickens—he never shied away from the serious undertones of his narratives. Bertolt Brecht, the influential German playwright, acknowledged Shaw's unique contributions to theatre in 1926 (Smart, 2002).

British cinema also ascended to prominence during the Edwardian era, becoming a favored form of entertainment among the populace. The Cinematograph Act of 1909 catalyzed the establishment of purpose-built cinemas and boosted production investment. The 1920s heralded the advent of sound films, with *The Jazz Singer* paving the way for what became known as "talkies." This era also saw the emergence of super theatres, which combined live performances with cinematic experiences, revolutionizing audience engagement.

The 1940s and 1950s are often referred to as the 'Golden Era' of British cinema, with ticket sales and film output reaching their zenith in the Fabulous Forties. However, cinemas were temporarily closed in 1940 due to fears of air raids during World War II. They reopened as the government recognized cinema's power to disseminate wartime propaganda. Despite the era's economic hardships, the film industry thrived, leading to the emergence of the "social problem film," which addressed pressing societal issues (Anna, 2022).

The rise of print media in late nineteenth-century Britain also profoundly impacted modernist movements. The proliferation of women's magazines, the feminist and suffrage press, and modernist 'small magazines' underlined the broad terrain of print culture that shaped literary activity during this time (Moore, D. 2020).

During the Victorian era, literature frequently delineated between child and adult audiences. Notable works like *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie and *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll were crafted for younger readers, employing fantasy themes that contrasted with the realism found in adult literature. Authors such as George Bernard Shaw, Rudyard Kipling, and James Joyce navigated both realms, producing works that resonated with audiences of all ages. Children's literature, however, often emphasized moral teachings over realism, aiming to instill a sense of wonder and creativity in young readers (Maria, 2011).

1.2. British Literature in 20th Century

1.2.1. Historical Background of Modernism in Britain

Modernism is a historical and intellectual movement that emerged in the early twentieth century, fundamentally altering the landscape of art, literature, and culture. The rise of Modernism can be attributed to various factors, particularly the profound disillusionment experienced in Europe following World War I (1918). The war's violent consequences left a legacy of fragmentation and disorder, reshaping the worldview of many individuals (Pericles, 2007).

As a worldwide and diverse aesthetic response to modernity and modernization, Modernism embodies an enthusiasm for change and innovation, focusing on the potential of the future. However, it also exhibits a critical stance toward the certainties of modernity, grappling with its investment in rationalism and the resultant phenomena—such as scientific advancements, industrial growth, urbanization, mass communication, entertainment, and accelerated travel. Emerging from various global centers, including Berlin, Vienna, Paris, New York, and London, Modernism took shape between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1976).

Between 1890 and 1940, artists across multiple disciplines—including painting, theatre, music, and literature—developed a heightened awareness of their surroundings and the societal transformations occurring around them (Pericles, 2007). Bradbury and McFarlane articulate this phenomenon in their book *Modernism (1890-1930)*, defining it as:

"An art of a rapidly modernizing world, a world of rapid industrial development, advanced technology, urbanization, secularization and mass forms of social life,

but also the art of a world which many traditional certainties had departed, and a certain sort of Victorian confidence not only in the onward progress of mankind but in the very solidity and visibility of reality itself has evaporated."

(Bradbury & McFarlane, 1976, p. 57)

Modernism emerged as a defining movement in the 1920s, inspiring critical movements such as Surrealism that emphasized innovative approaches to achieve new artistic outcomes. Various forms of expression—exhibitions, theatre, cinema, literature, and architecture—contributed to a shift in popular opinion regarding art and culture. However, this transformation was not without backlash; hostile reactions led to acts of vandalism against artworks, riots, and political condemnation, branding modernism as immoral and detrimental to society.

Rejecting conventional principles in favor of individual freedom and self-expression, modernists experimented with new forms of art and literature, giving rise to avant-garde movements like Surrealism. The rapid urbanization and evolving city life influenced modernist ideals, fostering a sense of individualism and a focus on the present and future. This cultural landscape gave rise to a burgeoning youth culture in the 1920s, characterized by movements like the "flapper" and the "New Negro," both of which challenged traditional ideals (Platt, 1985). Central to the Modernist ethos is nihilism, which rejects religious and moral foundations in favor of societal development. Modernists often criticized traditional morality for its perceived arbitrariness and conformity, viewing it as a mechanism of control over human emotions. Influenced by Darwin's Theory of Evolution, Freud's psychoanalysis, skepticism towards Western beliefs, and the traumas of World War I, nihilism became a prominent aspect of Modernism, frequently resembling a form of relativism. This thematic undercurrent is evident in works such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as well as the writings of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett. Eliot's poem intricately explores the complexities of nihilism, contrasting

it with a vibrant past, while Beckett's works—like *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*—are marked by a lack of religious structure, values, and authority, embodying the existential uncertainties of the time (Josh, 2008).

Modernism in British Literature .1.2.2

Modernist literature, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is characterized by a deliberate departure from traditional writing techniques in both poetry and prose fiction. This movement sought to challenge conventional representations and convey new sensibilities reflective of a rapidly changing world. The First World War served as a pivotal catalyst for this rethinking of social norms, prompting modernist writers to engage with the technical advancements and cultural shifts that defined their era. Mary Ann Gillies, in her analysis of *Modernist Literature*, underscores the necessity of a purposeful break with the past, describing modernism as a multifaceted response to a complex world that transcends geographical boundaries and artistic disciplines (Pericles, 2007). This intellectual trend is marked by an exploration of new narrative forms, innovative poetic structures, and experimental formats, all of which allow artists to express their creativity and originality in unprecedented ways.

Modernist authors and artists, such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, championed unique writing styles to communicate their ideas and reveal the intricacies of everyday life to their readers. For instance, Joyce's groundbreaking use of stream-of-consciousness in *Ulysses* (1922) allows for an intimate exploration of characters' thoughts and emotions, reflecting the complexities of modern existence. Similarly, Virginia Woolf employed innovative narrative techniques in works like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), weaving together subjective experiences to illuminate the fluidity of time and consciousness. During this period, artists began to articulate their own perspectives on life and the world through distinctive

literary styles. The modernist emphasis on individual perception and the subjective experience of reality marked a departure from the objective representations characteristic of earlier literary traditions (Pericles, 2007). This shift not only transformed the landscape of literature but also encouraged readers to engage more deeply with the text, prompting them to question established norms and consider alternative viewpoints.

1.2.2.1 Modernist Literature Themes and Techniques

Modernist literature gained popularity as a result of rapid industrialization and globalization. The advancements in technology, combined with the harrowing experiences of World War I, led many individuals to question the future of humanity: What would happen to the world? In response to this uncertainty, writers embraced modernist sentiment, seeking new avenues of expression while rejecting established norms and accepted views (Scribd, 2020). Modernist literature can be categorized into five major themes: **Individualism**, **Experimentation**, **Symbolism**, **Absurdity**, and **Formalism**.

- **Individualism** emphasizes the primacy of the individual over society, with writers often portraying vivid characters who challenge societal norms and integrity.
- **Experimentation** involves breaking away from traditional forms and approaches, fusing historical imagery with contemporary language and ideas.
- **Symbolism** is conveyed through inventive symbols that resonate with the themes of the modernist era.
- **Absurdity** is expressed through narratives that often highlight the nonsensical aspects of life, reflecting the disillusionment of the time.
- **Formalism** regards writing as a craft rather than merely a vehicle for creative expression, frequently employing rich vocabulary, foreign languages, and neologisms in poetry and prose.

Notable authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot are recognized for their groundbreaking experimental works. The trauma of the World Wars significantly influenced these writers, resulting in narratives that often depict a more absurd and fragmented reality (Scribd, 2020). Modernist literature boldly challenged traditional rules and conventions. This intellectual movement was characterized by distinct artistic and thematic elements. Modernist writers were often utopian and idealistic, placing a strong emphasis on creative self-consciousness. They crafted their writing styles based on personal experiences, aiming to portray individual lives in a manner that was both honest and realistic (Boussaiud, 2017). A hallmark of modernist literature is the use of shifting narrators or multiple voices. For example, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* employs monologues to narrate the story from various perspectives. Modernist authors prioritized depicting life as it unfolded, capturing the immediacy of experience and the profound nature of time. They emphasized inventiveness, valuing originality and seeking to present life from new viewpoints (Boussaiud, 2017).

Modernist literature explored themes that resonate with modern life and the inner workings of individuals. Authors rejected the traditional concepts of previous movements in favor of more relevant and impactful ideas. They grappled with themes such as the belief in art's transformative power, the relationship between art and self-consciousness, and the role of the artist in society (Boussaiud, 2017). The stream-of-consciousness technique became a defining feature of modernist writing. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are often hailed as masters of this literary style, which shifts away from conventional character archetypes, including the hero. The definition of heroism became increasingly ambiguous during this period. The modernist protagonist, disillusioned with society, religion, and the surrounding environment, often appeared to abandon heroic action (Scribd, 2020). Modernist texts employed various techniques, including fragmentation, symbolism, and allusion. They also utilized open endings, metaphors, and rich imagery to convey their themes (Boussaiud, 2017).

Modernist literature transitioned from realist narratives to fractured timelines and an emancipatory metanarrative. This shift was inspired by the aftermath of World War I, labor unionism, social unrest, and the influence of psychoanalysis. Modernist literature diverged from Romanticism by emphasizing everyday issues and presenting a critical view of alienated individuals within an urban, fragmented society. It frequently transcended the confines of realist novels, focusing on larger social or historical transformations, as evidenced in the works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce (Wikipedia, 2024).

Virginia Woolf, a renowned novelist and essayist, is regarded as one of the most important writers of modern literature. Her vivid imagination and sensitive personality enabled her to create literary masterpieces that capture the essence of life and the human experience. Unlike the conventional novels of the preceding century, which primarily targeted the upper classes, Woolf and her contemporaries aimed to make their writings accessible to all readers. Her topics mainly focused on human consciousness, gender relations, and social and psychological experiences (Galens, 2009). Woolf made significant contributions to the feminist movement. She preferred using the stream-of-consciousness approach to convey the complexity of the human psyche. Her innovative writing style and narrative techniques resulted in impactful experimental works (Galens, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter One has provided a comprehensive overview of the significant transformations in modern British literature during the early to mid-twentieth century. The rise of modernism as a critical response to the social, political, and cultural upheavals of the time marked a departure from traditional literary conventions, leading to innovative forms of expression. Writers such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf emerged as influential figures within this movement, each employing unique narrative

techniques to explore the complexities of human consciousness, identity, and social relations. Virginia Woolf's contributions, in particular, highlight the importance of addressing contemporary issues and the intricacies of individual experience, reflecting a broader societal shift toward self-awareness and introspection. As modernism sought to challenge established norms and embrace new perspectives, it paved the way for future literary movements, setting the stage for a dynamic and evolving literary landscape. This exploration of modernism not only illustrates the profound impact of historical events, such as World War I and the cultural shifts that accompanied it, but also underscores the enduring relevance of modernist literature in understanding the complexities of the human experience in a rapidly changing world.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework of Stylistics

Introduction

This chapter delves into the concept of stylistics, a vital branch of applied linguistics that focuses on the systematic study of style in texts. Stylistics serves as a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism, enabling a deeper understanding of how language functions within literature to convey meaning and evoke emotions. This exploration is particularly relevant in today's literary landscape, where nuanced interpretations of texts require a rigorous examination of the linguistic features that shape narratives. Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short are two prominent figures in the field of stylistics, whose work has significantly contributed to our understanding of the relationship between language and literature. They define stylistics as the study of how writers use language to create effects and how readers understand those effects (Leech & Short, 2007). Their framework provides a solid foundation for analyzing the linguistic and stylistic features present in literary works.

In this chapter, we will explore key concepts such as foregrounding, deviation, and parallelism, which are essential in understanding the impact of stylistic devices on narrative dynamics. Foregrounding highlights specific language features to draw attention to their significance, while deviation breaks away from expected norms, creating a sense of surprise or intrigue. Parallelism contributes to the rhythm and balance of a text, enhancing its aesthetic appeal. Moreover, we will examine the role of context in stylistic analysis, emphasizing that understanding the social, cultural, and historical backgrounds surrounding a text can greatly enrich our interpretation of its stylistic choices. By investigating how linguistic features contribute to the construction of meaning, we can develop a deeper appreciation for the artistry inherent in literary texts. Through this exploration, this chapter aims to illuminate the connections between language and literature, providing valuable

insights into the complex interplay between form and function in literary works. By understanding stylistics, we enhance our capacity to appreciate the subtleties of language that shape the reader's experience.

2.1. Stylistics and Literary Stylistics

2.1.1. Definition of Stylistics

Stylistics is a broad branch of applied linguistics that studies style in texts. It involves integrating linguistic concepts and disciplines to analyze and interpret various literary works (Aminu, 2015). Mick Short and Geoffrey Leech define stylistics as: “The study of stylistics focuses on how writers use language to create effects and how readers understand those effects” (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 1). Stylistics emphasizes language, its linguistic structure, as well as its forms and levels, which are critical in determining the function of a literary text. Stylisticians typically study how language is used in a given text. The primary goal of this discipline is to investigate the various linguistic and stylistic features manifested in a specific language that contribute to the production of expressive values, as well as to clarify the multiple linguistic issues present in the text. Crystal and Davy have highlighted the significance of stylistics in analyzing literary texts and have shed light on its main objectives, stating that: “The aim of stylistics is to analyze language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features common to English, those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context.” (Crystal & Davy, 1969, p. 10). Stylistics encompasses several types, including literary stylistics, descriptive stylistics, narrative stylistics, symbolic stylistics, linguistic stylistics, and pragmatic stylistics (Toolan, 1998).

2.1.2. Definition of Literary Stylistics

Literary stylistics is the study and analysis of the style of language and techniques used in literature to convey meaning, elicit emotions, and achieve aesthetic effects. It investigates how authors use elements such as diction, syntax, imagery, symbolism, and structure to craft their works and achieve specific effects on their audiences (Toolan, 1998). According to Leech and Short (2007), literary stylistics seeks to explain the relationship between language and artistic function. The two most important questions in literary stylistics are how and why. They propose that literary stylistics includes a relational concept, highlighting the correlation between linguistic description and aesthetic appreciation.

2.2. Mick Short and Geoffrey Leech's Stylistic Approach

2.2.1. The Concept of Style, Text, and Frequency

Frequency refers to how often specific linguistic qualities appear in a text. This concept is important for stylistic analysis, as it aids in identifying patterns and traits in an author's language use. By examining the frequency of certain words, phrases, or grammatical structures, one can reveal the author's focus on specific themes, characters, or ideas within the narrative (Leech & Short, 2007). Mick Short and Geoffrey Leech delve into the intricacies of language usage and selection from the author's perspective. They underscore the significance of also acknowledging the reader's viewpoint. Their discussion includes distinguishing unique styles through a study of feature frequency; it encompasses a concentration on the pattern of choices in the entire text. They emphasize the necessity of absolute comparison and statistical analysis to attain a thorough knowledge of stylistic nuances. They advocate for a solid understanding of stylistic distinctions between various texts or works to facilitate a more impartial and accurate analysis. Regarding style, Leech and Short (2007) define it as "the way in which language is used such that it belongs to parole rather than to langue" (p. 31). Halliday and

Hasan (1976) define text as “text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

2.2.2. Methods of Analysis

2.2.3. Linguistic and Stylistic Categories

Leech and Short (2007) categorize vocabulary into four groups: lexical, grammatical, figures of speech, cohesion, and context, with semantic categories often overlapping. This classification aids the reader in understanding vocabulary and its use in the text.

2.2.3.1. Lexical Categories

The stylistician analyzes the writer's lexicon, encompassing vocabulary, nouns, and morphological categories, with a focus on emotive language, idiomatic expressions, specialized terminology, semantic domains, abstract concepts, proper nouns, and collective nouns (Leech & Short, 2007). Leech and Short design guiding questions at each level to assist in interpreting these categories.

2.2.3.2. Vocabulary

Is the vocabulary simple or complex? How far does the writer make use of emotive and associative meanings, as opposed to referential meanings? To what semantic field do the words belong? (p. 61).

2.2.3.3. Nouns

Are the nouns abstract or concrete? What kinds of abstract nouns occur? What use is made of proper names? Collective nouns? (p. 61).

2.2.3.4. Adjectives

Are the adjectives frequent? To what kinds of attributes do the adjectives refer? Physical? Psychological? Visual? Auditory? Colour? Referential? Evaluative? Are the adjectives restrictive or non-restrictive? Gradable or non-gradable? Attributive or predicative? (p. 61).

2.2.3.5. Verbs

Do the verbs carry an important part of the meaning? Are they stative (referring to states) or dynamic? Do they refer to movements, physical acts, speech acts, psychological states or activities, and perceptions? Are they transitive, intransitive, or linking? (p. 61).

2.2.3.6. Adverbs

Are adverbs frequent? What semantic roles do they perform (manner, place, direction, time, and degree)? Is there any significant use of sentence adverbs? (p. 61).

2.2.4. Grammatical Categories

Grammatical categories involve modal auxiliaries, phrasal verbs, and various phrase types, such as prepositional phrases. Furthermore, it examines grammatical constructions such as comparative or superlative constructions and aspects, along with the utilization of modal auxiliaries. Additionally, it explores the application of phrasal verbs and other phrase types, as well as the overarching use of grammatical constructions like comparative or superlative constructions (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.2.4.1. Sentence Types

Does the author use only statements, or do questions, commands, exclamations, or minor sentence types occur in the text? If other types appear, what is their function? (p. 62).

2.2.4.2. Sentence Complexity

Do sentences, on the whole, have a simple or a complex structure? What is the average sentence length? What is the ratio of dependent to independent clauses? (p. 62).

2.2.4.3. Clause Types

What types of dependent clauses are favored: relative clauses, adverbial clauses, or different types of nominal clauses? (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.2.4.4. Clause Structure

Is there anything significant about clause elements? Do special kinds of clause constructions occur? (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.2.4.5. Noun Phrases

Are they relatively simple or complex? Where does the complexity lie? (p. 62).

2.2.5. Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are classified by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short to help readers better understand and appreciate literary styles. Metaphors, metonymy, and synecdoche all serve important functions in writing. Leech and Short concentrate on interpretive schemes, which include how metaphors and similes connect disparate semantic domains. This method aids in comprehending the deeper meanings and stylistic choices that authors use to enrich their narratives and elicit certain responses from readers (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.2.6. Cohesion and Context

Cohesion refers to the internal organization of a text, such as sentence structure, i.e., how articles, grammatical, lexical, and structural devices link different parts of the text (Leech & Short, 2007). Context refers to the external relations of a text or part of a text, such as the social relationships between participants and the sharing of knowledge and assumptions (Leech & Short, 2007)

2.3. Foregrounding

Leech and Short suggest that a fundamental element of aesthetic communication is foregrounding, or motivated deviation from linguistic or other socially acceptable norms. This concept is undoubtedly useful, if not crucial, for the study of poetic language. In this aspect of analysis, linguistic norms are seen as a “background” against which characteristics that stand out due to their abnormality are highlighted (Leech, 2014). Foregrounding involves making language creative and emphasizing meaning. It includes:

2.3.1. Deviation

Deviation is defined as “a breach of some rule or convention of English” (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 39). It refers to the difference between the normal frequency of a feature and its frequency in the text or corpus. For example:

“Freedom is slavery.” •

“War is peace.” •

“Ignorance is strength.” (Orwell, 1949, p. 34) •

Each example foregrounds a paradox or contradiction that challenges conventional logic and subverts standard language use. In “Freedom is slavery,” “freedom” and “slavery” are normally

antonyms, representing opposite concepts. In “War is peace,” “war” and “peace” are typically contradictory. “Ignorance is strength” associates “ignorance” (lack of knowledge) with “strength” (a positive trait), which also defies conventional logic and challenges the reader's understanding of these terms.

2.3.2. Conversion

Conversion refers to a change in word order to imply a particular meaning, as seen in the example:

“Town crowded.” •

In this case, the conversion between the noun and the adjective emphasizes the adjective “crowded” rather than the noun “town.”

2.3.3. Deviation from Common Collocation

Deviation occurs when an author intentionally breaks expected word pairings, creating unusual or unexpected combinations. By deviating from normal collocational patterns, the writer draws attention to the language itself, making certain phrases stand out to the reader (Leech & Short, 2007). For example:

“Bitter joy.” •

In this instance, “bitter joy” deviates from the more expected collocation, “bitter sorrow,” creating a striking and thought-provoking image that provokes the reader to reconsider the emotional impact of the words.

2.3.4. Parallelism

Parallelism occurs when the structure remains the same in both parts of a sentence, but the lexical items vary. For example:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.” (Dickens, 2007) •

The usage of lexical diversity and parallel structure produces a powerful rhetorical effect in the sentence. By reiterating “it was the...” throughout, parallel structure is created, resulting in balanced construction. The consistency and linguistic attractiveness of the text are enhanced by employing diverse words like “best,” “worst,” “wisdom,” and “foolishness” to draw attention to contrasts while preserving the same grammatical structure.

2.3.5. Repetition

Repetition can create foregrounding, as seen in the example:

“Blow, blow, thou winter wind.” (Shakespeare, 1997, p. 85) •

Shakespeare's lines use repetition to emphasize the harsh, unrelenting nature of the winter wind, highlighting its intensity and persistence.

2.4. Realism and Symbolism

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (2007) shed light on the roles of symbolism and realism in literature, emphasizing how authors utilize symbolic elements to add depth and complexity to narratives while maintaining a level of realism that resonates with readers. They point out how symbols aid in comprehending a novel's themes and characters, encompassing both realistic events and intricate details. Leech and Short meticulously analyze the literary techniques employed by authors to seamlessly integrate symbolic elements while preserving

the narrative's credibility. They provide valuable insights into how the use of symbolism in fiction enhances the reading experience by offering layers of meaning that go beyond the surface narrative. This invites readers to interact fully with the content, developing critical thinking skills as they interpret underlying themes and messages. This interaction leads to a more thought-provoking experience, as readers discover connections between symbols and the story's larger context. Additionally, symbolism enables authors to convey complex concepts and emotions concisely, enriching the narrative and making the writing more engaging (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.5. Function of Point of View

Narrators are essential in narrative because they provide the voice or perspective through which the story is told. They can be presented in the first or third person, conveying both personal and objective viewpoints (Leech & Short, 2007). Leech and Short explore the impact of point of view on a novel's narrative and the reader's experience. They highlight the significance of choosing a point of view in a novel, as it influences the story's narrative, character development, event presentation, and time management. For instance, a novel may be told from the perspective of a single main character, allowing readers to fully immerse themselves in their thoughts and emotions (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.6. Description in Literature

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short present a thorough examination of the significance of description in literature. They emphasize that description in literature is more than just a minor detail; it is an essential component of the style that helps to build the narrative world and enriches our comprehension of characters and events. They illustrate how carefully chosen words produce vivid mental images through lexical and grammatical choices that enhance the

mood and scenery. They also examine how rhetorical techniques, like metaphors and similes, can add vividness and suggestiveness to descriptions, making them more dramatic and innovative (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.7. Character and Characterization

Characters are the foundation of any narrative. They are the individuals in the novel who drive the plot forward while keeping the reader engaged. Characters may be human, animal, or abstract concepts, depending on the narrative. Physical qualities, personality traits, beliefs, goals, and flaws are unique to each character. These attributes influence how they perceive the world and interact with other characters and the events of the plot. Characters develop and change throughout the story arc. This development can be either beneficial (character growth) or negative (character regression) and is frequently caused by the obstacles and conflicts characters confront. Authors use a variety of approaches to introduce, characterize, and develop characters (Leech & Short, 2007). Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short explore character development in literature in detail. They investigate how writers create characters that evoke strong emotions and advance the plot. They dissect characterization with meticulous attention to detail, illuminating the methods used by authors to bring their fictional works to life (Leech & Short, 2007).

2.8. Irony

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short investigate irony as a critical literary strategy that emphasizes the disparity between appearance and reality, or between expectations and actual results. They categorize irony into three types: verbal irony, where a speaker says one thing but means the opposite, often conveying sarcasm or humor; situational irony, which highlights a significant difference between what is expected to happen and what actually

occurs, emphasizing life's unpredictability; and dramatic irony, where the audience is aware of information and situations that the characters are not, creating tension and anticipation. Leech and Short emphasize that irony is an effective tool in fiction because it allows writers to convey complex layers of meaning while also engaging readers by challenging their expectations and perceptions. Through irony, authors can deepen their characters, narratives, and themes, enhancing the overall impact of their works (Leech & Short, 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter explores the theoretical framework established by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in the field of literary stylistics, emphasizing the intricate relationship between language and literature through the integration of linguistic analysis with literary criticism. It focuses on how language is employed to construct meaning in literary texts, discussing key concepts such as foregrounding, deviation, and parallelism, and examining how these stylistic devices influence the dynamics of narrative across different literary genres. The chapter also addresses various types of stylistics, including literary, descriptive, narrative, symbolic, linguistic, and pragmatic stylistics. Moreover, it discusses the significance of style, text, and frequency to understand linguistic patterns, illustrating how meticulous analysis of word and structure repetition can reveal distinctive features of a writer's style, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the text. Additionally, the chapter delves into the role of figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, in enriching literary texts and providing multiple layers of meaning, emphasizing the importance of internal coherence within the text and the context surrounding it.

The chapter further explores the roles of realism and symbolism in literature, showing how symbolism adds depth to the narrative and enhances the reader's experience, while realism maintains the text's connection to a reality with which the reader can engage. It also discusses character description and development and how narrative perspectives shape character construction and progression, enhancing the reader's comprehension of events and characters. Finally, the chapter highlights the use of irony as a literary device that adds layers of meaning and complexity to the text by contrasting appearance with reality and expectations with outcomes. This comprehensive exploration offers a profound understanding of the significance of language in literature and its diverse uses in conveying complex messages, crafting a rich and enjoyable reading experience, and deepening our appreciation of the artistic and creative beauty inherent in literature.

Chapter Three:
Practical Framework
A Stylistic Analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

Introduction:

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* is a complex literary work that explores the profound search for meaning in life through her distinctive "stream of consciousness" technique. The novel presents the lives of six main characters through an uninterrupted flow of thoughts and emotions, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the psychological intricacies of these characters and their internal struggles.

In this chapter, we will analyze how Woolf employs imagery, symbolism, and stream of consciousness to address themes such as time, the quest for meaning, and isolation. Particular attention will be given to the central symbolism of the sea and waves, which reflect the characters' struggles with change and renewal. Additionally, we will examine how Woolf uses irony to highlight the contradictions between the characters' perceptions and the realities they face.

This analysis will be conducted using the stylistic approach outlined by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in *Style in Fiction*, which provides an analytical framework to explore the relationship between literary style and narrative content. This methodology will guide our exploration of Woolf's techniques and their contribution to the novel's thematic depth.

3. 1. Virginia Woolf's Biography

3.1. Woolf's Life

Virginia Woolf, born on January 25, 1882, in London, was a prominent essayist and novelist. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a well-known historian and literary critic, while her mother, Julia Stephen, worked as a nurse. Woolf's childhood was marked by both privilege

and trauma, including the early loss of her parents and sexual abuse by her half-brother. She was educated at home while her brothers attended public schools, which contributed to her feelings of frustration and exclusion. Despite this, Woolf developed a passionate interest in literature (Boussaid, 2017). A key member of the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf surrounded herself with influential intellectuals and artists. In 1912, she married Leonard Woolf, with whom she co-founded the Hogarth Press, which published her works. Woolf's writing explored complex themes of identity, mental health, and societal expectations. Struggling with mental illness throughout her life, she tragically committed suicide in 1941, leaving behind a lasting literary legacy that continues to shape feminist theory and modernist literature (Shihada, 2005).

3.1.1. Virginia Woolf as a Writer

Woolf's novels, marked by their psychological depth and stylistic innovation, are central to modernist literature. She utilized stream-of-consciousness techniques and explored themes like human consciousness, gender relations, and social norms. Her work aimed to be accessible to a wide audience, diverging from traditional novels that catered mainly to the upper classes (Boussaid, 2018). Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), was followed by *Night and Day* (1919), a narrative on love and marriage. *Jacob's Room* (1922) represented a shift to more experimental forms, focusing on fragmented viewpoints. Woolf's most famous works include *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), both of which delve deeply into the inner lives of their characters through innovative narrative techniques. *The Waves* (1931), considered her most experimental work, traces the intertwined lives of six characters through soliloquies, illustrating Woolf's deep exploration of human consciousness and the passage of time. *Between the Acts* (1941) was her final novel, published posthumously, further reflecting her engagement with complex themes (Boussaid, 2017).

3.2. Stylistic Analysis of *The Waves*

3.2.1. Summary

The Waves (1931) follows the interconnected lives of six friends—Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Susan, and Rhoda—across different stages of their lives, from childhood to old age. The novel is structured into nine sections, each symbolizing a different phase of life, using the motif of waves to represent the passage of time and the cyclical nature of existence (Course Hero, 2019). The characters' internal monologues reflect their personal struggles with identity, time, and loss. Percival, a central figure admired by all, dies early in the novel, creating a pivotal moment that influences the characters' development. Woolf's exploration of time, memory, and the fluidity of identity makes *The Waves* a rich study of human experience (Spark Notes, 2005).

3.2.2. Characters

3.2.2.1. Bernard

Bernard is a central figure in *The Waves*, defined by his obsession with language and storytelling. Throughout his life, he collects phrases in notebooks, seeking to make sense of the world through words. His struggle to find coherence in life mirrors Woolf's exploration of the limitations of language. Bernard's journey highlights the tension between the need for narrative structure and the chaotic reality of existence. In the end, he continues to search for meaning, reflecting Woolf's theme of life's complexity and the inadequacy of words to capture its full truth (Heyniger, 1972).

3.2.2.2. Jinny

Jinny represents the physical and sensual aspect of life. Unlike the other characters, she is deeply connected to her body and lives in the present, relishing in her beauty and social

interactions. Her perspective contrasts with the more introspective characters, as she embraces life's fleeting moments without dwelling on existential concerns. Jinny's struggle to maintain her identity as beauty fades highlights the tension between appearance and deeper meaning (Spark Notes, 2024).

3.2.2.3. Louis

Louis, an outsider due to his Australian background, grapples with feelings of alienation and insecurity. His dual identity as both a successful businessman and a poet reflects the central conflict in his life: the desire for material success versus artistic fulfillment. Louis's poetic reflections reveal his deep existential struggle, as he seeks to reconcile the chaos of life with the order he desires. His journey reflects Woolf's themes of identity and the search for meaning in an uncertain world (Spark Notes, 2005).

Here's the revised text without italicizing the quotations:

3.2.2.4. Neville

Neville is portrayed as a homosexual aesthete whose life is centered on art and literature. He prefers the order found in art over the chaos of the real world. His heightened sensitivity is illustrated when he says, "Stones are cold to my feet... I feel each one, round or pointed, separately" (p.7). This quote reveals Neville's acute attention to detail and his introspective nature. His sensory awareness shows his preference for an orderly, controlled environment where everything has meaning, contrasting with the disorder he finds in everyday life. Neville's disdain for religion and preference for the pagan world emerges in his statement, "I gibe and mock at this sad religion" (p. 35). He sees life's perfection only in art and literature, using poetry as a form of escapism. Neville says, "I am a poet, yes... Surely I am a great poet" (p.52), yet doubts his ability to achieve sincerity in his writing. His artistic struggles, reflected

in phrases like, "Words and words and words... I cannot give myself to their backs," emphasize his sense of inadequacy and failure to fully express the emotions he experiences.

3.2.2.5. Rhoda

Rhoda is the novel's most isolated character, perpetually feeling like an outsider. She expresses her alienation when she says, "I am nobody. I have no face... This great company... has robbed me of my identity" (p.22). Her disconnection from society is profound, as she struggles with a fear of human interaction and longs to escape into isolation. Rhoda finds brief solace in music and a temporary connection with Louis, but ultimately, her existential dread overcomes her. Her detachment is symbolized by the ocean, which she views as an endless, luring escape. She eventually commits suicide, and Bernard reflects on her tragedy, stating, "the figure of Rhoda, always so furtive, always with fear in her eyes... she had killed herself" (p.176). Rhoda's life embodies Woolf's exploration of existential alienation, with her death underscoring the fragility of those who cannot find meaning or connection in life.

3.2.2.6. Percival

Percival is portrayed through the perspectives of his six friends, who see him as a heroic, idealized figure. He represents strength and stability for them, particularly for Neville, who is in love with him. When Percival dies, it has a profound impact on each of the characters, symbolizing the loss of their shared ideal. Bernard, who admires Percival's conventional heroism, says, "He is conventional; he is a hero... The little boys trooped after him... for he is Percival" (p.177). This reflects Bernard's admiration for Percival as the embodiment of societal ideals. For Neville, Percival's death marks the end of his sense of purpose, as he laments, "He is dead... All is over. The lights of the world have gone out" (p.94). This line captures the emotional void Percival's death leaves in Neville's life. Rhoda, in a symbolic gesture, says:

"I will pick violets... and offer them to Percival" (p.100), representing her attempt to hold on to something tangible after his death. Percival's absence profoundly affects the group, as Jinny reflects, "love, hatred... this globe whose walls are made of Percival." (p.91)

3.2.2.7. Susan

Susan is a deeply physical character, driven by her connection to the land and her role as a mother. She expresses intense jealousy and insecurity, saying, "I hate Jinny because she shows me that my hands are red, my nails bitten" (p.80). Her physicality contrasts with Jinny's beauty, and her emotions are driven by her sense of inadequacy and her desire to escape the confines of motherhood. Susan reflects on her life with regret, saying, "I shall never have anything but natural happiness... I shall go to bed tired. I shall lie like a field bearing crops in rotation" (p.82). This metaphor highlights her acceptance of a life that is repetitive and tied to nature, but also her dissatisfaction with her role. She also expresses a longing for her past, noting that she feels trapped by her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Susan's emotional depth is further shown when she says, "The only sayings I understand are cries of love, hate, rage and pain" (p.82). Her connection to raw, primal emotions speaks to her struggle with the constraints of societal expectations. Ultimately, Susan's life reflects Woolf's exploration of the sacrifices women make for family and societal roles, and the regret that can accompany those choices.

3.2.3. Point of View

3.2.3.1. Illustration of First-Person Singular Narration

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* is notable for its use of first-person singular narration.

Each of the six main characters—Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis—uses

subjective monologues to explore their inner lives. This technique allows readers to access the intimate thoughts and emotions of each character.

3.2.3.1.1. Bernard

Bernard says, "I am the sun, the earth, the wind. I am the waves that ripple outwards and merge with the sea" (Woolf, 1931). Bernard's use of "I" emphasizes his perception of himself as part of a larger natural force. The quote reflects his sense of unity with the universe, dissolving the boundary between the self and the natural world.

3.2.3.1.2. Susan

Susan says, "I have had no more than a glimpse of myself in the mirror of my own mind, and yet I am always in pursuit of a vision that eludes me" (Woolf, 1931). This first-person narration illustrates Susan's internal struggle with self-awareness. Her pursuit of an ever-elusive vision represents her quest for understanding and self-discovery.

3.2.3.1.3. Neville

Neville says, "We are all fragments of something larger, striving to piece together the puzzle of our own existence" (Woolf, 1931). Although Neville uses "we" here, he reflects on his personal experience and struggle to find meaning. The use of collective language frames his personal perspective in a broader existential context.

3.2.3.1.4. Rhoda

Rhoda says, "Life is an endless cycle of coming and going, and within it, I search for a constant thread that can anchor me" (Woolf, 1931). Rhoda uses the first-person singular to express her struggle to find stability in the midst of life's flux. This reveals her personal battle with uncertainty and her yearning for something permanent to hold onto.

3.2.3.1.5. Jinny

Jinny says, "There is a rhythm to life, a pulse that beats beneath the surface of our daily existence" (Woolf, 1931). Jinny's narration showcases her awareness of a deeper rhythm within life, a perception that underscores her personal view of existence as patterned and cyclical.

3.3. Narrative Perspective in *The Waves*

In *The Waves*, Woolf uses a combination of first-person singular narration and a subtle third-person omniscient narrator. The characters' internal monologues are rendered through their voices, giving readers direct access to their thoughts and feelings. However, the third-person omniscient narrator occasionally steps in to offer minimal guidance, usually by identifying the speaker. For example, "'Now,' said Neville, 'I will try to tell you what I feel,' and looked straight at Bernard" (Woolf, 1931). Here, the narrator introduces Neville as the speaker but provides no insight into his thoughts or feelings. This approach limits the role of the narrator to identifying the speaker rather than offering interpretation or analysis. The interludes in *The Waves* provide another layer of narration, delivered by an unidentified omniscient voice. These sections, often poetic in tone, describe the movement of the sun and waves, symbolizing the passage of time and the progression of life. The narrator states, "The sun had not yet risen" at the beginning, mirroring the start of human life. These interludes

align the characters' monologues with the natural rhythms of the universe, linking individual experiences to the broader cycles of nature.

3.4. Literary Devices

3.4.1. Symbols

3.4.1.1. The Symbol of Waves

The waves in *The Waves* serve as a central symbol for the continuous and unpredictable flow of life. Life, as Woolf portrays it, consists of both joy and sorrow, and like the waves, it is ever-changing. Each of the six characters represents a wave, their lives rising and falling, much like the natural motion of the sea. This symbol reflects the uncertainty and instability of life, as well as its cyclical nature. Rhoda's relationship with the waves is particularly poignant. She feels disconnected from society, unable to conform to cultural norms or find stability in her identity. Rhoda says, "They sweep me between their great shoulders, I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths" (Woolf, 1931). Her desire to be swept away by the waves reflects her inner turmoil and yearning for dissolution, symbolizing her struggle with identity and her eventual tragic end. Bernard, in contrast, uses the wave metaphor to contemplate his life's fluidity, saying, "I distrust neat designs of life... What I like is luminous, is half-seen, is passing, is flecked by shadows" (Woolf, 1931). His recognition of life's impermanence and complexity highlights his acceptance of its ever-changing nature.

3.4.2. Imagery

3.4.2.1. Water as Physical Presence

Water imagery in *The Waves* is a recurrent motif that reflects the characters' inner lives. Rhoda, in particular, uses water to express her emotional state: "I have a fleet now swimming from shore to shore" (Woolf, 1931). This image of her ships floating on water suggests both the fragility of her dreams and her longing for escape.

3.4.2.2. Water as Reflection of Life

Water also serves as a metaphor for life's transience. Rhoda's musings, "Rolling me over the waves will shoulder me under. Everything falls in a tremendous shower, dissolving me" (Woolf, 1931), capture her sense of being overwhelmed by existence. The waves symbolize her emotional turmoil, as she struggles to stay afloat in the face of life's challenges.

3.4.3. Stream of Consciousness

The Waves is a prime example of stream-of-consciousness writing. Woolf uses this technique to present the characters' thoughts in a continuous flow, revealing their internal processes without interruption. Bernard reflects, "Our friends, how seldom visited, how little known... and yet... do not know altogether who I am... or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (Woolf, 1931). This passage exemplifies the fluidity of his thoughts, as he moves between reflections on his relationships and his own sense of self. Rhoda's thoughts are similarly fragmented, as she struggles to find meaning in her life: "The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone" (Woolf, 1931). Her inner monologue mirrors her emotional disconnection and isolation, highlighting her existential despair.

3.5.4. Themes

3.4.4.1. The Quest for Meaning in Life

The quest for meaning is central to the characters' journeys in *The Waves*. Each character grapples with questions of existence, identity, and the search for significance in life. Bernard, for example, struggles with defining himself and making sense of his observations throughout his life. His introspective nature drives him to seek coherence, yet he is often overwhelmed by life's uncertainties and the certainty of death. This search is echoed in the experiences of the other characters, all of whom face their own challenges with love, loss, and connection.

3.5.4.1.1. Bernard

As the novel's central narrator and the most reflective character, Bernard represents the collective voice of the group. His quest for meaning revolves around his desire to express his identity through stories and interactions. However, he struggles with feelings of inadequacy and the fleeting nature of life. His reflections suggest that meaning is found in the interplay between individual experiences and collective memories. In the concluding part of the novel, Bernard reflects on his life and experiences, saying:

The fact is that I have little aptitude for reflection. I require the concrete in everything. It is so only that I lay hands upon the world. A good phrase, however, seems to me to have an independent existence. Yet I think it is likely that the best are made in solitude. (Woolf, 1931, p. 44)

This quote illustrates Bernard's struggle with artistic expression. He favors tangible experiences over abstract reflection but recognizes the importance of solitude in crafting

meaningful thoughts. Bernard's reflections emphasize the complexity of finding meaning in a world full of uncertainties.

3.5.4.1.2. Rhoda

Rhoda, marked by existential dread and a deep sense of alienation, also embarks on a quest for meaning. Her search is defined by her feelings of isolation and her inability to find stability or comfort in conventional social norms. Her internal struggle reflects the broader theme of seeking authenticity and connection in an overwhelming world. Rhoda says: "I am turned; I am tumbled; I am stretched, among these long lights, these long waves, these endless paths, with people pursuing, pursuing." (Woolf, 1931, p. 18) This passage reflects Rhoda's inner turmoil and her sense of being overwhelmed by life. Her imagery of being "turned" and "tumbled" in the waves highlights her struggle to find stability, while her mention of being pursued suggests a tension between her desire for connection and her fear of intimacy.

3.5.4.2. Childhood and Terror

The Waves also explores the terrors of childhood. Woolf delves into the formative experiences of each of the six protagonists, emphasizing the themes of loss, vulnerability, and the unknown. These childhood experiences shape their identities and influence their adult lives. For example, Louis recoils from emotional intimacy, and Susan's passions are tinged with fear and self-harm. Neville's terror arises from his recognition of forbidden love in a society where homosexuality is taboo. Woolf uses the apple tree to symbolize the inevitable consequences of sin, whether defined by religious or societal norms. Chapter 8 reflects the culmination of these childhood terrors, as the characters reunite and confront the

consequences of their choices. Percival's death is a catalyst that forces the characters to reconcile with loss and consider the meaning of their lives. This moment of collective grief helps them understand the importance of embracing life's possibilities while acknowledging its limitations. The novel also addresses the fear of neonatal mortality and the fragility of children. The characters' early experiences with death and vulnerability shape their sense of self and their lifelong search for meaning. The fear of the unknown manifests as existential anxiety, which each character copes with in different ways throughout their lives.

3.5.4.3. Identity

The theme of identity is intricately woven throughout *The Waves*, as Woolf explores how individuals define and express themselves. The novel follows the lives of six major characters from childhood to old age, allowing readers to witness their evolving sense of identity over time. Woolf suggests that identity is not fixed but fluid, shaped by circumstances, interactions, and personal reflection. Bernard, the most introspective of the group, embodies this fluidity. He says: "I am not one and simple, but complex and many." (Woolf, 1931, p. 48) This quote captures Bernard's recognition that identity is multifaceted, composed of different roles, feelings, and experiences. He further acknowledges that his sense of self is shaped by others, stating: "To be myself, I need the illumination of other people's eyes." (Woolf, 1931, p. 72) This dependency on others highlights the novel's exploration of how identity is formed through relationships and social interactions. Woolf also emphasizes the interconnectedness of identity, as the characters' soliloquies blend into one another, creating a continuous narrative flow. Bernard's self-description as "an entire theatre company of Bernards" illustrates the multiple roles he plays in life, underscoring the complexity and fluidity of selfhood.

3.6.1. Irony

3.6.1. Verbal Irony

In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf employs verbal irony to highlight the gap between characters' self-perceptions and the reality of their actions and emotions. One notable example is Bernard's exaggerated sense of self-importance. He often expresses his thoughts in grandiose terms, only for the narrative to reveal the contrast between his perception and reality. For instance, Bernard says:

"I am filled with the delight of youth, with potency, with the sense of what is to come. Blundering, but fervid, I see myself buzzing round flowers, humming down scarlet cups, making blue funnels resound with my prodigious booming."

(Woolf, 1931, p. 53)

Here, Bernard's description is filled with verbal irony. He describes himself as "blundering" but also "fervid," suggesting a mismatch between his enthusiasm and his actual effectiveness. His use of the phrase "prodigious booming" humorously undercuts the seriousness of his self-portrayal, as it evokes a clumsy image rather than one of graceful youth. The exaggerated visual imagery of "scarlet cups" and "blue funnels" further adds to the irony, emphasizing the gap between his inflated sense of self and the absurdity of his actions. This reflects Bernard's complex inner life and his artistic struggles to define himself (Duprey, 2024).

3.6.2. Situational Irony

Situational irony in *The Waves* arises from the difference between the characters' expectations or desires and the actual outcomes of their actions. Woolf uses this technique to emphasize the contradictions and complexities in the characters' lives, particularly their search for meaning and connection. A poignant example of situational irony is Rhoda's struggle with identity. Rhoda consistently battles feelings of disconnection and a lack of self. She longs for belonging, yet she feels alienated, as reflected in her statement: "I have no face." The irony lies in the fact that Rhoda's deep desire for identity and connection leads to her tragic end. Despite her constant efforts to reconcile her inner turmoil with the outside world, she ultimately commits suicide, symbolizing the profound disconnect between her inner world and the external reality she cannot face (Study.com, 2023).

3.6.3. Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony in *The Waves* occurs when the reader is aware of critical information that the characters themselves do not fully grasp. This technique adds emotional depth to the narrative, particularly as the characters are unaware of certain impending events that the audience anticipates. One of the most striking examples of dramatic irony involves the character of Percival. He is idealized by the six friends, who see him as a symbol of strength and stability. They view him with reverence and admiration, describing him as their anchor. However, the reader knows that Percival will tragically die in a horseback riding accident in India. This foreknowledge creates a sense of tension and sadness, as the characters continue to express their affection for him, unaware that he will soon be lost to them. The dramatic irony intensifies the emotional weight of his death, as the characters are oblivious to the tragic fate awaiting their idealized friend. (Study.com, 2023)

Conclusion

Chapter Three of this analysis explored various literary techniques employed by Virginia Woolf in *The Waves*, highlighting the depth of her narrative and thematic development. Through the use of stream of consciousness, symbolism, irony, and complex narrative perspectives, Woolf crafts a work that transcends traditional storytelling, delving into the human psyche and the quest for meaning. The symbolism of the waves serves as a central motif, reflecting the ebb and flow of the characters' lives, their interconnectedness, and the inevitable progression toward death. Each character's journey, from childhood through adulthood, represents a broader philosophical exploration of identity, self-awareness, and the struggles for connection and authenticity in a fragmented world.

Woolf's innovative use of stream of consciousness allows readers to engage intimately with the characters' inner worlds, revealing the contradictions, desires, and insecurities that shape their lives. The layered use of irony further emphasizes the disparity between their perceptions and reality, reinforcing the themes of isolation and existential uncertainty. Finally, the literary devices examined in this chapter underscore Woolf's exploration of life's impermanence, the search for meaning, and the intricate dance between individual identity and collective experience. *The Waves* emerges as a work of profound psychological and philosophical depth, its structural complexity mirroring the very nature of human existence



General conclusion

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Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, published in 1931, is regarded as one of her most creative and inventive works. The novel follows six friends—Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Susan, and Rhoda—through their journeys from childhood to adulthood. Using a distinct narrative structure that employs stream-of-consciousness, Woolf allows readers to delve deeply into each character's inner thoughts and emotional experiences. Set against the backdrop of early twentieth-century English society, *The Waves* explores significant themes of identity, connection, and the passage of time. Its unique style emphasizes the characters' psychological development as they navigate relationships and the challenges of life. Woolf's unconventional approach to narrative, focusing on inner experiences rather than external events, makes *The Waves* a profound reflection on consciousness and existence, securing its place as a seminal work in modernist literature.

This dissertation, titled *The Quest for Meaning in Life in 20th Century British Novels: A Stylistic Analysis of Virginia Woolf's The Waves*, aims to analyze how Woolf articulates the existential pursuit of meaning through her stylistic choices. The primary research question posed is: How does Virginia Woolf use stylistic devices to express the theme of the existential quest for meaning in *The Waves*? To address this question, the study reviews relevant literature and is structured into three chapters. The first chapter, *Britain in the 20th Century*, provides a historical overview of Britain during the modernist period and examines the literary features and prominent authors of that era. The second chapter, *Theoretical Framework: Literary Stylistic Approach*, delves into the concepts proposed by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, focusing on foregrounding, deviation, and parallelism. These concepts are crucial for understanding Woolf's unique style, especially in how she uses word choice, structure, and repetition to reveal deeper meaning. The final chapter offers a detailed stylistic analysis of *The*

General conclusion

Waves, demonstrating how Woolf uses imagery, symbolism, and irony to explore themes of time, identity, and the quest for meaning.

Woolf's *The Waves* is a profound exploration of existence, and through her stream-of-consciousness technique, she delves into the inner psychological struggles of her six characters. By employing rich imagery and symbolism, such as the sea and waves, Woolf articulates deeper existential themes. Irony also plays a critical role, highlighting the contrast between the characters' ideals and their lived realities. Born in London in 1882, Woolf was part of the Bloomsbury Group, a collective of intellectuals and artists who sought to push the boundaries of literature. Her works often grappled with themes of identity and the search for life's meaning, and her tragic suicide in 1941 left a lasting impact on feminist thought and literary discourse.

The findings of this research reveal that *The Waves* intricately ties the theme of the quest for meaning to its six central characters. Throughout the novel, each character struggles with existential concerns and desires, reflecting the complexities of the human condition. Woolf's innovative use of stream-of-consciousness allows her to express their internal passions and conflicts, offering a deeply introspective narrative largely from their individual perspectives. In conclusion, this modest exploration of Virginia Woolf's intricate style and poetic narrative in *The Waves* has provided valuable insights into her most challenging work. It is hoped that this study will serve as a source of inspiration and knowledge for future readers, students, and scholars of literature.



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ملخص الدراسة

تحاول هذه الأطروحة دراسة موضوع البحث عن المعنى في الحياة بدراسة رواية الأمواج لفرجينيا وولف باستخدام تحليل أسلوبى. الغرض من هذا البحث هو مناقشة الميزة الأسلوبية التي استخدمتها وولف للتعبير عن موضوعها. تم اتباع طريقة تحليلية وصفية باستخدام منهج جيفري ليتش و ميك شورت في الأسلوب الأدبي القصير، وتم أخذ البيانات الأولية للدراسة من رواية "الأمواج" كأساس لتحليل الأسلوبى في الرواية. وقد ركزت الدراسة على تقديم رؤى قيمة حول تقنيات وولف السردية وتأثيرها على العمق الموضوعي للرواية. كما أن هذه الدراسة تتكون من ثلاثة فصول، الفصل الأول يتناول النظرية الخلفية التاريخية للحدث في الأدب البريطانى في القرن 20، أما عن الفصل الثانى فقد تضمن مقارنة ليتش وشورت في كتاب الأسلوب في الرواية ، بينما يشمل الجزء العملي ملخصاً لهذه الأخيرة، ومواضيعها، والأدوات الأدبية المستخدمة، وتحليل الشخصيات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الأمواج تقدم استكشافاً عميقاً لموضوع البحث عن معنى الحياة من خلال عرض صور مختلفة للحياة عبر الشخصيات الرئيسية. الكلمات المفتاحية: فرجينيا وولف ، الأمواج ، مقاربات ليتش وشورت ، تيار الوعي ، الحدث ، التحليل الأسلوبى ، البحث عن معنى في الحياة.