Musical Forms and Aesthetics
in the Works of Virginia Woolf

by
Emilie Crapoulet

Submitted for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy/Thèse de Doctorat (‘en cotutelle’)

Department of Music and Sound Recording
School of Arts, Communication and Humanities
University of Surrey
Great-Britain

in collaboration with the

Département d’Etudes du Monde Anglophone
Ecole Doctorale ‘Langues, Lettres et Arts’
Université de Provence
France

June 2007
© Emilie Crapoulet 2007
At a moment when Modernist artists manifest a widespread concern with interdisciplinary aesthetic experiences, Virginia Woolf draws her inspiration from music as she seeks to transcend the boundaries of her own art in order to redefine and create new forms of literary expression. Even though a very small number of critics have recognized the fact that music in Virginia Woolf's works is more than just a detail or an occasional background element, no comprehensive study of her musical aesthetics has yet been attempted. After investigating in Chapter 1 the modalities of Woolf's life-long interest in music and the role of music in her aesthetics of literature, we examine in more detail Woolf's aesthetics of music in Chapters 2 and 3, by giving a close reading of one of her short stories, 'The String Quartet'. In an analysis which brings into play some of the more fundamental problems which many philosophers of music are currently concerned with, we show that in this text, Woolf explores with great lucidity and insight the entire spectrum of the ways music makes meaning, from the relation it bears to the consciousness, the imagination, language and literary expression, to its potential ontological, transcendental and paradigmatical function. This clears the ground for a study of the actual method of her musicalization of the novels themselves in Chapters 4 and 5. We focus in particular on the more experimental narrative strategies Woolf adopts in The Waves and Mrs Dalloway in order to show how music in Virginia Woolf's works is an essential dynamic, structural and aesthetic force which permeates the whole fabric of her art. Crossing the boundaries between literary scholarship and musicology, this dissertation also seeks to bring to light the many assumptions interdisciplinary scholars unwittingly make about the nature of musical expression and meaning in their analyses of musicalized fiction. In our reassessment of the established melopoetic typologies, we are finally led to propose an alternative approach to the study of Modernist musicalized fiction.
# Table of Contents

Table of Figures ........................................................................................................ viii

Table of Abbreviations .............................................................................................. x

Preface ................................................................................................................... xii

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1. Virginia Woolf and Music ................................................................. 5

a. A musical life .......................................................................................................... 5

b. Intentionality, music and impersonality .............................................................. 33

c. Street music, nursery rhymes and the voice of the gramophone: the voice of 'Anon' in *Between the Acts* ........................................................................... 58

Chapter 2. Making music represent: Virginia Woolf's 'The String Quartet' ................................................................. 69

a. 'The String Quartet': a fictionalization of music? ............................................ 70

(i) Preliminary observations .................................................................................... 70

(ii) Words about music: Virginia Woolf and musical criticism ......................... 79

(iii) Programme music? From Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet to a Mozart string quartet ................................................................................................. 84

(iv) The problem of the musicalization of the story's structure ......................... 87

b. Modes of listening ............................................................................................... 96

c. Musical story-telling: a game of make-believe? .............................................. 103
d. The musical paradigm in the literary tradition: representation *versus* non-referentiality .......................................................................................................................................................................................... 109

Chapter 3. Music and Mind ......................................................................................................................... 117

a. The musicalization of the stream of consciousness ......................................................................................... 118
   (i) The Modernist turn to music .......................................................................................................................... 118
   (ii) Water, music and the stream of consciousness in ‘The String Quartet’ ........................................ 125
   (iii) The first dream-sequence ......................................................................................................................... 130
       • From the fish-laden river .......................................................................................................................... 130
       • ... to an expression of abstract musical motion ...................................................................................... 138
       • Towards a music of the music of the mind ............................................................................................ 143

b. Regaining the vitality of a Modernist expression of emotions through music ................................................................................................................................. 150
   (i) The evocative music of a Romantic sensibility: the second dream-sequence of ‘The String Quartet’ ..... 150
   (ii) The paradise lost of literary emotion ......................................................................................................... 155
   (iii) Beyond emotional sentimentalism: music as a model for an expression of the compounds of emotion of the “Modern Mind” ......................................................................................................................... 163
       • On the emotions in music .......................................................................................................................... 163
       • “Sorrow” and “joy”: the subversion of sentimentality in the second dream-sequence ......................... 169
       • Suggesting *versus* showing in the third dream-sequence: the musical origins of Woolf’s cinema of the future ........................................................................................................................................ 173

c. Music and the search for truth ......................................................................................................................... 184
   (i) Marching into the desert of absolute music: the final dream-sequence ............................................ 185
   (ii) Musical transcendence ............................................................................................................................... 190
       • The musical space in the Woolfian landscape .......................................................................................... 190
       • The retreat from the “horror of human intercourse”: music *vis à vis* society in *The Voyage Out* .................................................................................................................................. 199
   (iii) Music and the search for truth in ‘The String Quartet’: the pre-concert “orts, scraps and fragments” ........................................................................................................................................ 206
Chapter 4. *The Waves* as musicalization of fiction .......... 225

a. A musical “conception”? ........................................................................................................ 225

b. *The Waves* and the musical model: conflicting melopoetic readings of *The Waves* ................................................................................................................................. 231

   (i) From Beethoven to Schoenberg .......................................................................................... 232

   (ii) Reading Beethoven’s op. 130/133 into *The Waves* .......................................................... 246

       • Characterization in terms of musical movements .......................................................... 246

       • Bernard as the “Grosse Fugue”, op. 133 ........................................................................ 254

       • Louis as the *Presto* (op. 130) ........................................................................................ 255

       • Susan as the Andante con moto ma non troppo (op. 130) .............................................. 261

       • Clements’ conclusions ...................................................................................................... 264

   (iii) Other melopoetic readings of *The Waves*: literature, opera and ballet ................................ 268

       • From the Woolfian Wagnerians ....................................................................................... 268

       • ... to Stravinsky’s *Firebird* ............................................................................................. 276

c. *The Waves* as a symphonic narrative ....................................................................................... 279

   (i) The symphonic paradigm ...................................................................................................... 279

   (ii) Symphonic orchestration in *The Waves* ......................................................................... 283

   (iii) Towards a new typology of musicalized fiction ............................................................... 288

   (iv) A polyphonic narrative: from a *mise en abyme* of voices in *Mrs Dalloway* to the narratorial voice(s) of *The Waves* ................................................................................. 298

Chapter 5. Virginia Woolf and the “soul” of music .......... 321

a. The rhythm of words .................................................................................................................. 322

   (i) “Dancing to the barrel organ”, music, words and poetry .................................................... 324

   (ii) The musical effect in prose: from words to sentences to whole pages at a time .................. 340

b. The novel as composition, the problem of large-scale musicalization: two case-studies ............................................................................................................................... 348

   (i) The contrapuntal style of *Mrs Dalloway* ....................................................................... 348

       • A musical conception? ...................................................................................................... 348
• The flight of the musical fugue .................................................................350
• *Mrs. Dalloway* (scene one): Clarissa in Bond Street ......................357
• *Mrs. Dalloway* (scene two): the mysterious motor car ..............362
• *Mrs. Dalloway* (scene three): the soaring aeroplane ..................365

(ii) From orchestration and thematic transformation to sonata-form in *The Waves* ........................................................................................................368

c. The 'singing of the real world': a final word on Virginia Woolf's musical aesthetics ..................................................................................................................381
(i) Woolf's musical conception of rhythm ...........................................381
(ii) 'We are the words, we are the music, we are the thing itself': the music of creation .................................................389

Conclusion ........................................................................................................399

Appendices ........................................................................................................409

Appendix 1: Visual music – the musical paradigm in *début du siècle* painting, an overview ...............................................................................................................410

Appendix 2: 'The String Quartet', complete text with structural outline ........415

Appendix 3: Extract from James Joyce’s ‘The Dead’ (*Dubliners*) ..........419

Appendix 4: Extract from Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, 'Pointed Roofs', Volume 1, Chapter III, part 7 .................................................................421

Appendix 5: Extract from E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*, Chapter 5 ......422

Appendix 6: The ‘stream of consciousness’, an overview .......................424

Appendix 7: Chronology of the writing of *The Waves* .......................429

Appendix 8: Summary of intermedial correspondances between Beethoven, quartet op. 130/133 and *The Waves* according to Clements (2005) .........430

Appendix 9: Review of Katie Mitchell’s production of The Waves at the National Theatre, London, 9th of December 2006 .................................................433

Bibliography ........................................................................................................438

Primary sources: works by Virginia Woolf .................................................439

1) Fiction, biography, essays .............................................................................439
2) Diaries, letters, collected essays ................................................................. 439
   A - Diaries .................................................................................................. 439
   B - Collected letters .................................................................................. 440
   C - Essays .................................................................................................. 441
   D - Miscellaneous ....................................................................................... 442

Secondary sources .......................................................................................... 442

1) Works pertaining to Virginia Woolf ............................................................... 442
2) All other primary and secondary sources (other authors, works on aesthetics, music - including scores -, literature and interdisciplinary studies, and aesthetics of literature and music) ......................................................... 448
# Table of Figures

Figure 1. *Angelica playing the violin* by Duncan Grant, 1934 .............................................7  
Figure 2. Paul Cézanne, *Le Mont Sainte-Victoire vu de la Carrière Bibemus* (c. 1898) ....28  
Figure 3. Vanessa Bell, woodcut for the first edition of Virginia Woolf’s ‘The String Quartet’, *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) ....................................................................................69  
Figure 4. W.A. Mozart, Serenade No. 13 in G major, K 525, “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” ................................................................................................................................................133  
Figure 5. Franz Schubert, ‘Trout’ Piano Quintet, op. 114, First movement, opening page ................................................................................................................................................137  
Figure 6. Frédéric Chopin *Etude* op. 25 no. 1 in A flat major .............................................141  
Figure 7. Orpheus charming the beasts - Roman mosaic ......................................................153  
Figure 8. Dr. Kaligari (played by Werner Krauß) ..................................................................179  
Figure 9. Table of pantonal/serialist musico-literary correspondences for *The Waves* as outlined in Levin and Schulze .........................................................................................241  
Figure 10. Beethoven, op. 130, mvt I, *Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro*, bars 1-19...........251  
Figure 11. Beethoven op. 130, mvt II, *Presto*, bars 17-29 (opening of Trio section) .........257  
Figure 12. Beethoven op. 130, *Presto*, bars 47-71 .............................................................258  
Figure 13. Beethoven op. 130, mvt II, *Presto*, bars 1-16...................................................259  
Figure 14. Leon Bakst’s costume design for Stravinsky’s *Firebird*, 1910 .......................278  
Figure 15. Last page of Part I (bars 89 to 100) of the full score of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony: on this page, cf. the 38 staves for 66 individual “parts” or “voices” (incl. 21 different instruments, 2×4 voice choir and 5 vocal soloists) - public domain edition downloaded from http://www.imslp.org .........................................................................................285  
Figure 16. Photo of the orchestra and choirs at the American première of Mahler’s 8th Symphony involving 1068 performers conducted by Leopold Stokowski in Philadelphia in 1916 ........................................................................................................................................286  
Figure 17. Werner Wolf’s diagram of “intersemiotic forms” .................................................291  
Figure 18. Franz Liszt, excerpt from ‘Pensées des Morts’, from *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses* .................................................................................................................................292  
Figure 19. Wolf, diagram of “basic forms of intermediality” .................................................293  
Figure 20. Wolf’s re-interpretation of Scher’s typology of the “main areas of musico-literary studies” ................................................................................................................................................295  
Figure 21. Wolf, ‘Types of Potential Evidence for the Musicalization of Fiction’ .........296  
Figure 22. Preliminary typology of musicalized fiction .........................................................297
Figure 23. Applied interdisciplinary typology: diagram of the musicalization of *The Waves* ........................................... 320

Figure 24. Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘Spring and Fall’ (1880). This poem is described in a note by Francis Bridges as an example of “sprung rhythm” (note the accented syllables ls. 1, 3, 5, 11 and 14). ........................................... 330

Figure 25. Hugo Ball’s “score” for his sound poem ‘Karawane’ ........................................... 336

Figure 26. Opening bars from Edith Sitwell’s ‘Hornpipe’ from *Facade*. ........................................... 338

Figure 27. J.S. Bach, fugue in C major, BWV 846, bars. 1-9 ........................................... 353

Figure 28. J.S. Bach, Fugue in C major, subject ........................................... 354

Figure 29. Structural outline of Exposition of Bach Fugue in C major ........................................... 354

Figure 30. Breakdown of harmonic progression, bars 1 to 6, J.S. Bach, Fugue in C, BWV ........................................... 356

Figure 31. Justin London’s analysis of the rhythmical layering of Bach’s Prelude in C from *The Well-Tempered Klavier*, Book 1, bars 1-2. ........................................... 385

Figure 32. Maurice Ravel, ‘Oiseaux Tristes’ from *Miroirs*. ........................................... 386

Figure 33. Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, last 5 bars, Part I, ‘L’Adoration de la Terre’ ........................................... 387

Figure 34. Wassily Kandisky, Untitled (First Abstract Watercolor). 1910 .................. 410
References to Virginia Woolf's works are given between brackets embedded within the text as follows: Title of work, essay and/or collection (see abbreviations below), volume number when necessary, followed by the page number, i.e. *Letters*, Volume 1, page 41 = *L*1: 41, *The Waves*, page 116 = *W*, 116, etc.. In some cases, for the sake of clarity, this is also followed by the date of the diary entry, letter or the year of publication of the essay. The works are listed below in chronological order from date of first publication. The works published after 1941 are posthumous. For full details of editions used, please see bibliography.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of first publication</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td><em>The Voyage Out</em></td>
<td>VO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td><em>Night and Day</em></td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td><em>Monday or Tuesday</em></td>
<td>MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td><em>The String Quartet</em></td>
<td>SQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td><em>Jacobs Room</em></td>
<td>JR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Mrs Dalloway</em></td>
<td>Mrs D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>The Common Reader First Series</em></td>
<td>CRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td><em>To the Lighthouse</em></td>
<td>TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>Orlando</em></td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td><em>A Room of One's Own</em></td>
<td>ROO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>The Waves</em></td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. References to the holograph drafts are given as *W* followed by either Draft I or Draft II plus the page number given in J.W. Graham's transcription. *W*, Draft I/II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td><em>Flush</em></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td><em>The Common Reader Second Series</em></td>
<td>CRII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td><em>The Years</em></td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td><em>Three Guineas</em></td>
<td>TG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td><em>Roger Fry: A Biography</em></td>
<td>RF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td><em>Between the Acts</em></td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td><em>The Death of the Moth and Other Essays</em></td>
<td>DM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td><em>A Haunted House and Other Short Stories</em></td>
<td>HH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td><em>The Moment and Other Essays</em></td>
<td>TM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td><em>The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf</em> (ed. Susan Dick)</td>
<td>SF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
 PREFACE

This work was prepared within the context of an international convention ("These en cotutelle"), conducted jointly under the guidance of Prof. Max Duperray, Département d'Études du Monde Anglophone, Université de Provence, France and under the supervision of Jeremy Barham, Department of Music and Sound Recording, University of Surrey, England.

Though the result of marked effort in Entente Cordiale, the presentation of this thesis - both in its written form and its oral examination, can only reflect but a compromise between the all-too often contradictory French and English research guidelines. A few observations need here be made concerning the format of the present work, though, as we all know, the intricacies of Franco-British relations would merit a thesis in themselves.

The French officially conceded the language (French 'Doctorats' being always written in French), which, considering the topic (a study of the style and aesthetics of an English novelist) and the difficulty which the English academic contingent may have faced when confronted with a work written entirely in French, was a fair enough proposition.

In return, the English conceded the length. Whereas British PhDs do not usually exceed the 100 000 word ceiling, the French expect you to write a far more substantial work whose upper word limit is not specified, though typically, a Thèse de Doctorat would span no less than four to five hundred pages - the length of the present thesis. As the interdisciplinary nature of the topic necessitated at times explanations of both musical and literary techniques which, within their own domains would not necessarily have been needed, but within the cross-disciplinary context, are helpful for those not familiar with either musical analysis or literary critique, I opted to follow in this matter, the French lead.1

The referencing though was a tricky business. The French favour footnotes and Latin abbreviations, the English try their best to discourage you from using either. After careful consideration however, the following format was chosen for clarity and has been followed throughout: quotations taken solely from Virginia Woolf are referenced between brackets within the text itself (cf. list of abbreviations), quotations from any other sources are referenced in

1 we shall be using "we" and "I" equally throughout this thesis - "we" being a stylistic means very often used in continental scholarly writings to involve the reader in the debate.
footnotes. For this reason, the concise Anglo-Saxon author/date ‘Harvard System’ was not necessary. I therefore give a full first reference (author, work, edition, date), and subsequently opt for ‘op.cit.’ and ‘ibid.’ (followed by the page number, and, in cases of multiple works by one author, the title), these abbreviations being particularly clear when used in footnotes. The bibliography therefore also follows a traditional presentation of author, title, edition, date.

The sheer logistic difficulty of arranging for the oral examination to take place on board a neutral ship anchored in the middle of the Channel was too daunting. It could be said that a flip of a coin decided on England rather than France as geographical location for the viva, and though this undoubtedly gives the impression that the English have an unfair advantage over their French counterparts, the same could have been said if the coin had fallen on its other face. The advantage however is only geographical: it is to be hoped that the procedure will remain, in this case as in all cases outlined above, a joint and collaborative process and will show the signs of a true academic Entente Cordiale.

One last word remains to be said. Not only caught between the cross-fire of international politics, the topic in question stirred up the troubled waters of academic disciplinarity. Different disciplines, however sisterly they may try and feel towards each other, are particularly susceptible and they do, at times, come into direct conflict, the one tugging the other in the one direction, the other tugging the first in the very opposite direction. There was no “right” way however, as I stood at the crossroads of so-called “interdisciplinarity”, a word which in itself implies disciplines, boundaries and the trespassing into dangerous enemy territory. Neither a work of musicology in the traditional sense of the word, nor a purely literary literary critique, this thesis reflects an open-minded approach to both music and literature, to the specialist but also the “common reader” (or listener), in an effort to nurture the rich fruits of artistic cross-pollinations.

In the hope of bridging some of the more recent divides which have so unfortunately wrenched the sister arts apart, this work is destined to both musicologists and literary scholars, artists and philosophers of art, musicians and writers,

for I hear music, they were saying. Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken.

(Virginia Woolf)
INTRODUCTION

I always think of my books as music before I write them.

Virginia Woolf

In recent years, Virginia Woolf\(^1\) has been under the scrutiny of an increasing number of scholars, fascinated by the variety and scope of her works, all bent upon investigating a particular aspect of her writings, be it stylistic and linguistic analyses, thematic readings, philosophical or psychological critiques, feminist, social or biographical studies.\(^2\) The publication from 1977 to 1984 of her complete and unabridged diaries as well as her letters from 1975 to 1980 has further increased the interest in a character whose artistic ambivalence and creative energy have often puzzled her audience.\(^3\)

Surprisingly enough, despite the fact that Virginia Woolf said in a letter in 1940 to Elizabeth Trevelyan, that

> you have found out exactly what I was trying to do when you compare [Roger Fry] to a piece of music. Its odd, for I'm not regularly musical, but I always think of my books as music before I write them. [...] Just as you say, I am extraordinarily pleased that you felt this. No one else has I think (L6: 426)\(^4\)

- no particular in-depth study has ever been done on music in Virginia Woolf's works. From Harold Child's ambivalent reception of 'Monday or Tuesday' in The Times Literary Supplement of April 1921 to Peter Jacobs' brief biographical survey of Virginia Woolf's life-long passion for music in the 1990s, as well as the more recent

---

\(^1\) To avoid confusion, we shall refer to Virginia Woolf both as "Virginia Woolf" and as "Woolf" throughout, including some references to the time before her marriage to Leonard Woolf. Leonard Woolf will appear as "Leonard Woolf" where appropriate.

\(^2\) see Lillian D. Bloom, 'They All Cried Woolf', NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction, Vol. 7, No. 3. (Spring, 1974), pp. 255-266. Despite the fact that this article was written in 1974, Bloom already perceives an accrued interest in Woolfian studies, in the early 1970s.


\(^4\) N.B. in quotations from her texts, Virginia Woolf's own sometimes erratic spelling and punctuation has been kept throughout.
and systematic article or chapter-length interdisciplinary criticism\textsuperscript{5} and the pervading but rather loose musical analogies fancied by so many critics of Woolf, the notion that music plays an important part in Woolf's aesthetics of prose proves to be a constant preoccupation, if not always a clearly delineated one, of Woolfian studies.\textsuperscript{6} As Peter Jacobs has argued,

scattered over the diverse output of her career some suggestive glimpses of 'musicality' in all its possible forms occur. [...] Virginia Woolf processed and inconspicuously integrated into her art all that music could offer her in the way of technical and thematic inspiration.\textsuperscript{7}

The formal structure of this thesis is motivated by a theoretical interdisciplinary principle and reflects a dialectic between some of the fundamental issues concerning the nature of musical expression and meaning in its relations to literary expression and language, and the analysis of the actual principles and modalities of the concept of "musicalization of fiction", to use the expression coined by Aldous Huxley,\textsuperscript{8} as exemplified in the works of Virginia Woolf. We shall be moving from the problem of the representation of music in literature, raising the question as to whether music may be considered to represent anything outside its own musical sphere -, to music per se considered as methodological paradigm.

That Woolf had an in-depth knowledge of music is undeniable and we trace in Chapter 1 her life-long interest in this art. Her wide-ranging experience of musical performances will lead Woolf to question the nature of musical expression in relation to her own writing. By establishing that the musical paradigm is closely linked in Woolfian aesthetics to the notions of impersonality and authorial anonymity – exemplified in particular in her handling of music in \textit{Between the Acts}, we articulate

---

\textsuperscript{5} by Allen McLaurin, Werner Wolf, Mark Hussey, Jane Marcus, Gyllian Phillips, Elicia Clements and James Hafley, to name but a few.

\textsuperscript{6} Musicians themselves have been drawn to her writings. The setting of extracts from Woolf's diary to music by the American composer Dominick Argento in 1975, \textit{From the Diary of Virginia Woolf}, a song cycle which was to win the coveted Pulitzer Prize, as well as the controversial "minimalist" style of Philip Glass's music, composed for the soundtrack of the 2002 film \textit{The Hours}, based on Michael Cunningham's rewriting of \textit{Mrs Dalloway}, may have been influential in fuelling the more recent interest shown towards the link between music and Woolf's writing.


one of the fundamental aspects of the Woolfian conception of the musicalization of fiction, i.e. the covert musicality of her style. This necessarily affects our own methodological approach to the matter since we cannot expect to find in her novels the usual interdisciplinary clues.

By taking as a starting point Virginia Woolf’s short story, ‘The String Quartet’, we shall endeavour to show in Chapters 2 and 3, that far from revealing an understanding of the musical experience as foremost an art of imaginative free association and emotive sentimentalism, as this text may suggest at first reading, ‘The String Quartet’ is in fact an ekphrastic, or, to be more musically conscious, a melophrastic reflection on the way music makes meaning within a literary context, specifically in its relation to language, consciousness and the imagination. This gives us the groundwork for an initial theoretical backdrop to Woolf’s musical aesthetics and illustrates in particular her move away from a literary or representative understanding of music towards a Post-Impressionist understanding of music’s purely abstract and formal properties.

This provides us with the ideal springboard for an investigation in Chapters 4 and 5 of the modalities of Woolf’s musicalization of the novels themselves by focusing our attention on one of Woolf’s most avant-garde experiments in Modernist fiction, The Waves. By taking the necessary critical distance demanded by the specific overarching formal interdisciplinary modalities exemplified in Woolf’s full-length works, we shall centre in these chapters on one of the more problematic and controversial angles in interdisciplinary studies, i.e. how Woolf’s innovative narrative strategies make use of the purely musical qualities of music. So doing, we shall seek to give some answers to the interdisciplinary problems raised throughout the investigation by highlighting the theoretical implications of Virginia Woolf’s own highly idiosyncratic understanding of music and melopoetics within the context of her original literary aesthetics, proposing a new theoretical typology of melopoetic crossovers. Finally, we shall show how the various facets of Woolf’s musicalization of fiction exemplify an original understanding of music which has important repercussions within the wider domain of interdisciplinary studies in general, leading

---

us to question the notion of the musicalization of fiction in order to show how Virginia Woolf's aesthetics demonstrates rather, a musicalization of the artistic vision.

The scope of this investigation is three-fold: first, to bring to the fore the very much neglected or worse still, misunderstood, role of music in Virginia Woolf's literary aesthetics; secondly, to test the limits of the methodological tools of today's interdisciplinary criticism in order to propose an alternative critical approach in which music plays more than a metaphorical role; and finally, to question the nature of musical expression and meaning, and the criteria by which we assess its value.
CHAPTER 1. VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MUSIC

a. A musical life

It is undeniable and widely acknowledged that the frame and modalities of Virginia Woolf’s life and being, which are painstakingly recorded in her diaries and letters, are intrinsically linked to her work as a novelist as she constantly analyzed and sought inspiration from her own life experiences, musical experiences included, in an on-going reflection upon her art. Only the most attentive scrutiny of her diaries, letters and essays, brings to light the full significance of what proves to be a most essential aspect of her writing: her musicality. Much can be gleaned from these sources, if only, we admit, as a prelude and support to an investigation of the texts themselves.

Leonard Woolf will insist in his autobiography, Downhill all the Way, that “all the activities of her life” were “registered as to some extent the raw material of her art” as he goes on to describe her humorously as “a whale letting the seawater stream through its mouth, straining from it for its use the edible flora and fauna of the seas”. Virginia Woolf thus “strained off and stored in her mind those sounds and sights, echoes and visions, which months afterwards would become food for her imagination and her art.” Speaking of the influence of day to day life on the art of the novelist, Virginia Woolf herself will say, “I remember a saying of Henry James – all experiences are of use to a writer” (L6: 478), also noting in her diary, “I mark Henry James’s sentence: Observe perpetually” (D5: 357). The novelist, above all other artists, is under the immense strain of constantly having to deal with what she calls “life itself” (E4: 161) whilst painters or musicians have the privilege of “withdrawing” from the world, “shut[ting] themselves up for weeks alone with a dish of apples and a paint box, or a roll of music paper and a piano” (‘Life and the

2 ibid., p. 178; Virginia Woolf used a similar metaphor of the "writer" as a "fish in mid-ocean" in her essay 'Life and the Novelist' (CE2: 131):
Taste, sound, movement, a few words here, a gesture there, a man coming in, a woman going out, even the motor that passes in the street or the beggar who shuffles along the pavement, and all the reds and blues and lights and shades of the scene claim his [the novelist's] attention and rouse his curiosity. He can no more cease to receive impressions than a fish in mid-ocean can cease to let the water rush through his gills.
3 Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way, an Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939, op.cit., p. 178.
Novelist’, E4: 400-401). Novelists never cease to be “played on by the subject matter of [their] art” (E4: 400), constantly changing their impressions and perceptions “into the fabrics of their art” (E4: 401). In 1934, Virginia Woolf will jot down a quotation from Maupassant’s journal of 1887, *Sur l’Eau*, noting that

> Maupassant, on writers – (true I think).

> “En lui aucun sentiment simple n’existe plus. Tout ce qu’il voit, ses joies, ses plaisirs, ses souffrances, ses desespoirs, deviennent instantanément des sujets d’observation. Il analyse malgré tout, malgré lui, sans fin, les coeurs, les visages, les gestes, les intonations.” (D4: 242)

We are indeed fortunate in that Virginia Woolf’s diaries give us a detailed account of her daily impressions which she often recorded for later reference when searching for a scene or a character for her works of fiction.

From an author who in her earliest years humorously toyed with the idea of founding a colony “where there shall be no marrying - unless you happen to fall in love with a symphony of Beethoven – no human element at all, except what comes through Art – nothing but ideal peace and endless meditation” (L1: 41-42), Woolf’s life-long experience of music in particular is extraordinarily rich, varied and intense. Irresistibly drawn towards this art, five years later, in 1906, she will reveal in particular her attraction towards the synaesthetic nature of her perception of sound, writing to Violet Dickinson,

> I have been having a debauch of music and hearing certain notes to which I could be wed – pure simple notes – smooth from all passion and frailty, and flawless as gems. That means so much to me, and so little to you! Now do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well? (L1: 263-264)

This synaesthetic experience of music will feature in all her novels, from the “philosophy” of the eccentric Miss Marchmont of *Jacob’s Room*, who will spend her life in the British Library poring over books in order “to confirm her philosophy that

---

4 The quotation Woolf makes from Maupassant can be translated as follows: “He no longer feels any simple emotion. Everything he sees, his feelings of happiness, pleasure, suffering, his moments of despair, instantaneously become a subject of observation. He analyses despite everything, despite himself, without end, hearts, faces, gestures, tones of voice.”
colour is sound – or perhaps, it has something to do with music” (JR, 104), to Septimus Warren-Smith in Mrs Dalloway, who will be amazed to find “that music should be visible was a discovery”, seeing the sounds rising “in smooth columns” into the air, creating “visible” (Mrs D, 76) shock-waves – these “visible” sounds becoming more palpable to him than any tangible physical object. Breaking beyond the boundaries of sound alone to encompass colours, textures and shapes into her perception of music will be, as we shall see, one of the most important features of her aesthetics, further contributing to her interdisciplinary approach to the arts.

Figure 1. Angelica playing the violin by Duncan Grant, 1934

Many of her friends, members of her family and her acquaintances were musicians. She was related to the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, who married her friend and cousin, Adeline Fisher, in 1897. She affectionately called him “that great Ralph”, noting in 1900 how he “goes on writing unpublished masterpieces, and grows his hair longer and longer” (L1: 39) and eventually, as his fame grew, she went

---

5 Duncan Grant, Angelica playing the Violin. Oil on Canvas, 1934. Arts Council Collection, Hayward Gallery, London. [http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh_gfx_en/ART18991.html](http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh_gfx_en/ART18991.html) - one of Duncan Grant’s decorated Charleston chimneyplaces is clearly visible behind Angelica; see also Duncan Grant’s “Girl at the Piano”, Oil on Canvas, 1940, N05171, Tate Britain ([http://tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=:999999977&artistid=1203&page=1](http://tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=:999999977&artistid=1203&page=1)). Angelica Garnett, niece of Virginia Woolf, now living in Forcalquier (France), told me over the phone on the 18th March 2007 that the “Girl at the Piano” was indeed herself, painted when she was about 14 years old. She also said that she had been playing a lot of piano at that time and that Virginia Woolf had heard her play in Charleston on many occasions.

6 see Virginia Woolf diary entry in A Passionate Apprentice for the 10th of June 1897 (PA, 98). See also L1: 15.
to hear his works premiered in London. Her niece, Vanessa Bell's daughter, Angelica Garnett, originally studied drama and music before turning to the visual arts and was painted by Duncan Grant playing the violin and the piano in their home in Charleston (see figure 1 above). Another life-long friend with whom Virginia Woolf corresponded regularly was the writer and historian R.C. Trevelyan who was to write many libretti to Donald Tovey's operas, leading Woolf to remark one day that “[Tovey] sets Bob Trevelyan's unreadable plays to unplayable music, an economical arrangement on the part of Providence” (L4: 344). As Peter Jacobs has argued, several figures dominated Virginia Woolf's musical life, even though, as Elicia Clements rightly points out, Woolf will manifest a highly original understanding and use of the musical model in her novels, thus distantiating herself from the musical aesthetics of her peers. Nevertheless, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Ethel Smyth, and to some extent Roger Fry, will probably be amongst some of the most influential sources of her musical culture, though we have very little documentary evidence left of their discussions. The painter and art critic, Roger Fry, one of Virginia Woolf's earliest friends, whose biography she will write in the late 1930s, will not so much introduce Virginia Woolf to music as such but he will undoubtedly nurture her early interdisciplinary aesthetics, drawing her attention in particular towards the musical qualities of the visual arts. Organiser of the first Post-Impressionist Exhibitions in England in 1910 and 1912, he will indeed speak of the “new visual music” of contemporary Modernist painting. We shall return in more detail to his views below.

Virginia Woolf's early friendship with Saxon Sydney-Turner on the other hand, a friend of her brothers' and a member of the Bloomsbury circle, will be instrumental in initiating her to a varied programme of musical performances usually followed by heated debates and arguments as to the music played, the value and nature of contemporary styles and the quality of the performers. A musical amateur in the

---

7 cf. *PA*, 249: “a beautiful new Music Hall on Bond Street where Plunket Greene was singing Ralphs [sic] songs.” ; *PA*, 251-252: “After dinner to the Freshfields, where a select company heard Tovey play. V[aughan] W[illiams] &c.”.
11 Leonard Woolf, an old friend of Saxon Sydney-Turner, described him as “an inveterate concert and opera goer in London and Bayreuth. He kept a record, both on paper and in his head, of all the operas he had ever been to. Normally with other people he was reserved, spoke little, and fell into long and
highest sense of the term, he was also himself an *apprenti* composer, Woolf having witnessed at first hand rather enviously his composition skills: “S.T. [Sydney-Tumer] is now downstairs with Adrian, making out a chess problem, or fingerling his own opera on the piano. For they can write music, as well as Latin and Greek and all the rest of it” (*L1*: 311). A fervent Wagner follower, it was Saxon Sydney-Tumer who was to take the young Virginia Stephen to Germany with her brother Adrian to hear Wagner’s operas *in situ* in Bayreuth and she will follow up her visit by writing a review of the performance of *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin* for *The Times* in August 1909. We know from a letter Virginia Woolf wrote to her sister Vanessa from Bayreuth that “the time seems to go in preparing for the opera, listening to it, and discussing it afterwards” (*L1*: 404-405). The following day, she had been “discussing obscure points in Parsifal all the morning” with Adrian and Saxon, remarking that they had been reading through the scores before hearing the operas (“They make me read the libretto in German, which troubles me a good deal” *L1*: 407). As well as Wagner, they also heard Strauss during this trip to Germany and compared the styles of the two relatively new and exciting composers:12 “We went to Salome, (Strauss, as you may know) last night. I was much excited, and believe that it is a new discovery. He gets great emotion into his music, without any beauty. However, Saxon thought we were encroaching upon Wagner, and we had a long and rather acid discussion” (*L1*: 410, 24 August 1909).13 In 1908, in preparation for the trip, she had been learning German with her brother Adrian. Asking Lytton Strachey for tea one day, she will write, “Could you come to tea with me on Thursday? I have got so miserably involved in opera and the German language that that seems to be the only free afternoon” (*L1*: 333), and she was reading through the libretti with Adrian and her teacher, Miss


13 see also, “Now we are going to read Parsifal, and then lunch, and the we shall hear the immortal work.” (*L1*: 404, August 1909); “I cant pretend that I have yet mastered Saxons reasons for not finding [Parsifal] so exciting at the first time of hearing as some others; or Adrians reasons for feeling just the opposite” (*L1*: 250).
Daniel: “We go almost nightly to the opera, and in the afternoon we have our German. Yesterday we came to a passage about maidens and the perils of war, at which [Miss Daniel] blushed and said to me, as one woman to another, ‘We will not read this, as It is not nice’” (L1: 331). Throughout her life she will turn to Saxon Sydney-Turner for his musical insight and knowledge, checking up with him, for instance, a reference to Beethoven’s op. 111 piano sonata in The Voyage Out erroneously printed as “op. 112” in the first English edition. In the 1930s, Ethel Smyth will become a major musical figure, if not musical influence, in Woolf’s life. Not only was she a very close friend but Woolf attended most of the premieres of her works as well as listened to broadcasts of her performances on the wireless. She will also be present at some of the rehearsals such as the following one in 1930, which she then described in a letter to Ethel:

If only I weren’t a writer, perhaps I could thank you and praise you and admire you perfectly simply and expressively and say in one word what I felt about the Concert yesterday. As it is, an image forms in my mind; a quickset briar hedge, innumerable intricate and spiky and thorned; in the centre burns a rose. Miraculously, the rose is you; flushed pink, wearing pearls. The thorn hedge is the music; and I have to break my way through violins, flutes, cymbals, voices to this red burning centre. Now I admit this has nothing to do with musical criticism. It is only what I feel as I sat on my silver winged (was it winged?) chair on the slippery floor yesterday. I am enthralled that you, the dominant and superb, should have this tremor and vibration of fire round you - violins flickering, flutes purring; (the image is of a winter hedge) - that you should be able to create this world from your centre. Perhaps I was not thinking of the music but of all the loves and ages you have been through. Lord - what a complexity the soul is! (L4: 266-267)

Elicia Clements will furthermore trace in Woolf’s works the influence of Ethel Smyth as she provided Woolf with a first hand example of a professional musician, possibly

14 “I wonder if you would once more tell me the number of the Beethoven sonata that Rachel plays in the Voyage Out – I sent the copy I marked to America, and now they’re bringing out a new edition here – I can’t remember what you told me – I say op. 112 – It can’t be that.” (L2: 418, 25 Jan. 1920). Rather amazingly, some scholars have failed to spot this error in some editions which have maintained the reference to op. 112 and have even written at great length about the influence on the novel of the musical symbolism of op. 112.

15“I shall listen in” (L4: 206); “our gramophone wireless I mean, has been smashed in spring cleaning. So what a bore – neither E[thel] S[myth] in spirit not in flesh. But soon I hope.” (L5: 397).
giving her the model for Miss La Trobe’s character in Woolf’s last novel, *Between the Acts*. Interestingly, at the start of her new “musical” friendship with Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf yet again had turned to Saxon Sydney-Turner to ask him about the value and nature of her music (*L4:* 264), even though she will later on be scathingly critical of her style: “It seems possible to me that nature gave her everything except the power of expression in music: hence the race & violence & restlessness of her nature: the one outlet is stopped up (*D4:* 14-15), “Aren’t I right though to make [Ethel Smyth] take to her pen, not her harp?” (*L5:* 429) She will eventually come to describe her music as too “Germanic”, noting in her diary that “they say she writes music like an old dryasdust German music master” (*D3:* 306) and she will be particularly distraught by ‘The Prison’, avoiding Ethel Smyth for days so as not to have to give her opinion (see *L4:* 405) but writing to George Ryland that “last night, sweating with horror, I listened to the Prison, set to music – if cat calls, early birds and last posts can be called music – and Lord the defunct butlers and ladies maids who sang – by Ethel Smyth” (*L4:* 403). Very often Woolf will hide behind a facade of (false) inaptitude to avoid the consequences of giving a negative opinion. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West, she wrote she had met a “young musician” at a dinner party who “confirmed” her in her opinion that “Ethel has infinite competence and not a note of music in her. So think of me, who hate opera sitting under 5 hours of Wreckers with her beside me, I suppose. Another row, I make no doubt” (*L4:* 379-380). Following this performance she will note in her diary that “some of the W[reckers] was vigorous & even beautiful; & active & absurd & extreme; & youthful: as if some song in her had tried to issue & been choked” (*D4:* 49) but will write to Ethel Smyth on the other hand that “I dont for a moment suppose that I shall be able to say anything whatever about the Wreckers – not for some time anyhow. I’m incredibly ignorant and slow about music” (*L4:* 389) and she will later on say that “I have several times thought I was going to sit

---

16 Elicia Clements, ‘Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction’, *College Literature*, Summer 2005, Vol. 32, No.3, pp. 51-71. Elicia Clements does not however quote a diary entry of 1930 in which Virginia Woolf reports a conversation she had with Ethel Smyth: “Would you like me to write something about you? I said. Oh yes; what fun! But I should try some experiments. Oh what fun! How should I enjoy it! But I should get it all wrong. Yes, of course; or tear them up. Do just as you like. [...] so I now make a few notes as she talks, for a portrait. One would have to bring out her enormous eagerness. She was telling me how she reads Travel books; & her eyes – her blue, rather prominent eyes, positively glitter. And this is not talk about herself, or her music – simply about how people climb – their adventures. Her cheeks burn too. But she looks now & then aged: she said that she was a very brave woman. It is a quality I adore. [...] What a strange job then to write, as I may one day, the life of a woman whose past is thus so nebulous.” (*D3:* 325-326).
down and write a long long letter on a vast white sheet about the Wreckers; but then the bell rings, or something interrupts. Moreover, I dont suppose my views are anywhere close enough to sense about music to count. [...] I was singing the 2nd Act – How you’d have laughed, at the mess I was making: But, as the late Mrs Pankhurst was it, used to say, ‘enough’. I’ll describe the Wreckers to you someday by word of mouth” (L4: 393).

From her record of her daily life, we learn that her love of music will lead her to attend innumerable live performances in the capital’s major venues as well as many small private subscription concerts.17 In 1905 alone, while living in London, she attended a “weekly concert” (“Out to my weekly concert”, PA, 257), and sometimes went to listen to live music every three or four days (“Gerald to lunch, & afterwards I went to my familiar concert”, PA, 269).18 During her first illness in 1904, she had been taken out of the bustle of London to have some months’ quiet rest but she dearly missed her “music”:

It is such a natural thing from an outsiders point of view, that I get only congratulations, and people say how lucky I am, and how glad I ought to be out of London. They dont realise that London means my own home, and books, and pictures, and music, from all of which I have been parted since February now, - and I have never spent such a wretched 8 months in my life. (L1: 147)

In 1908, after spending a reclusive summer holiday in Manorbier, in South Wales, she writes to Saxon Sydney-Tumer that she is “pining for music” (L1: 362). Well documented in her diaries and letters, we know that she regularly went out to the opera either in London when she was residing there, or in Glyndebourne, which was not very far from her house in Rodmell (L5: 401), even though she clearly preferred solo recitals or chamber music performances (L4: 379-380). She also attended performances given by Les Ballets Russes in London (cf. L1: 497)19 and mentioned

17 She subscribed to private concert series such as those given in Shelley House, Chelsea in 1918-1919 (cf. D1: 219-220, 226, 245, 251, 309).
18 cf. the numerous references to music in A Passionate Apprentice for the year 1905 (in particular, PA, 222, 226, 229, 233, 234, 249, 252, 254, 257, 260, 261, 269, 271, etc.).
19 Leonard Woolf will describe the artistic atmosphere of the year 1911, speaking in particular of the Russian dancers: “Night after night we flocked to Covent Garden, entranced by a new art, a revelation to us benighted British, the Russian Ballet in the greatest days of Diaghilev and Nijinsky”, and he will continue, a few pages later: “The Russian Ballet became for a time a curious centre for both
their ground-breaking style of contemporary dance in several of her novels (cf. the *Voyage Out* (*VO*, 158), *The Years* (*Y*, 424), etc.). She often met up with Maynard Keynes and his wife, the Russian dancer Lydia Lopokova, whom she describes as a "lark soaring" (*D3*: 18) and who had danced with Nijinsky in choreographies of Stravinsky's music and often appeared with Leonide Massine in London theatres. Of Lopokova, she will write,

> Madame Lopokova has by nature that rare quality which is neither to be had for the asking nor to be subdued by the will – the genius of personality. She has only to float on to the stage and everything round her suffers, not a sea change, but a change into light, into gaiety; the birds sing, the sheep are garlanded, the air rings with melody and human beings dance towards each other on the tips of their toes possessed of an exquisite friendliness, sympathy, and delight. (*CE*1: 30)

Woolf went to innumerable recitals by famous pianists and instrumentalists, symphonic concerts led by renowned conductors, as well as chamber music performances, hearing both past and contemporary works written by the utmost variety of composers. Interestingly, Virginia Woolf's passion for music even led her to take firm steps towards creating a musical salon in 1925. Vita Sackville-West's cousin, Edward, who was both an author and an increasingly renowned music critic, lent the Woolfs his grand piano which was put in their flat in London, Virginia Woolf

---

fashionable and intellectual London. It was the great days of Diaghilev with Nijinsky at the height of his powers in the classical ballets. I have never seen anything more perfect, nor more exciting, on any stage than Scheherezade [sic], Carnaval, Lac de Cygnes, and the other famous classics." *Beginning Again an autobiography of the years 1911-1918*. Leonard Woolf, London: The Hogarth Press, 1968, p. 37 and 48 respectively; see also Evelyn Haller, 'Her Quill Drawn from the Firebird: Virginia Woolf and the Russian Dancers', in Diane Gillespie (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 180-226.

20 Virginia Woolf was also to use Lydia Lopokova as a model for Rezia in *Mrs Dalloway* (see *D2*:265, 310).

21 Soloists included Rudolf Serkin, Anton Rubinstein, Donald Tovey, Maud MacCarthy, Hans Richter, etc. Conductors included Sir Henry Wood, Sir Edward Elgar, Fritz Steinbach, Franz Beidler, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Arthur Payne, Nadia Boulanger (whom she actually met at a lunch with the Princess de Polignac, 27 Nov. 1936. *D5*: 37), etc. Chamber ensembles included the Joachim Quartet, the English Quartet, etc. In 1921, she went to listen to the whole series of Beethoven quartets, which were being performed in chronological order by the London String Quartet at the Aeolian Hall, noting in her diary how "every afternoon for a week I've been up to the ″Aeolian Hall; taken my seat right at the back; put my back on the floor & listened to Beethoven quartets".

22 Such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Debussy, Ravel, Tchaikovsky, Berlioz, Grieg, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Weber, Brahms, Schumann, Beethoven, Mozart, Handel, Bach, Verdi, Dukas, Walton, Ravel, Lalo, Franck, Gounod, Strauss, etc.
remarking that “the studio makes a very good concert room” (L3: 196). In a letter to Edward, she writes of her plans of establishing a series of regular performances:

The piano arrived safely, and has already given a 2 hour concert, when one of Angus Davidsons’s brothers sang, and it was the greatest success.

I hope to give many more concerts of this kind in the autumn, and we shall consider you our patron. All the thanks are on our side. – which reminds me that Chappell must, of course, send me their bill for tuning, if you would be so good as to tell them to come regularly. (L3: 195-196)

After a few concerts however, Virginia Woolf fell severely ill for several months and Edward Sackville-West was unfortunately obliged to recover the piano which had started deteriorating in the damp air (L3: 222, 240).

In addition to live performances, Virginia Woolf also listened to many recordings as she was born at a moment which saw the invention of the phonograph and the gramophone. From the original experimental voice-recording device, these machines were developed to such an extent as to capture musical performances and reproduce ad infinitum what, up to then, had been one-off concert experiences. The essence of the musical experience and, as we shall see below, the experience of sound itself was from then on changed for ever. The social aspect of concert-going both fascinated her but also distracted her mind from the actual music being performed and the gramophone provided her with an ideal alternative. In 1935, Woolf reports having been to a concert with Ethel Smyth, and describes the antics of the conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, whose face was “beaming, ecstatic, like a yellow copper idol: such grimaces, attenuations, dancings, swingings: his collar crumpled” (D4: 284). Already in one of her early diary sketches, in 1903, she will contrast the intensity and power of the music itself with the “fiddler’s” look of weariness and disillusionment which would often break the spell of the performance:

But the music again! I am getting tired I confess. I can no longer dance in spirit – nor I fancy do the fiddlers fiddle with that gaiety with which they started. After all they are not inspired Gods, calling men to a more joyous & passionate existence, a dance which shall last through life & into eternity – they are pale, perhaps corpulent men, who fiddle thus every night of the week - fiddle till 3 o’clock every morning, & long for their glass of beer & the last dance on the programme. They fiddle every night, & it is part of their business to strike up thus – so courageously & freely – to lash their bows across their strings, as though the God himself were in their veins. [...] There is something grim in the notion; they fiddle every night – the same tunes probably, but only once for the same dancers. They dont believe much in their fiddling & its wonderful properties. It earns them very little in hard cash, I daresay - & yet night after night they sit in their corner, & set couples dancing in mazes all round them. [...] But these fiddlers dont believe a word of it. They look out with weary disillusioned eyes – no need to look at their music – they know that by heart, & the dancers too. Still they must stick to it. [...] I can see them leaning back in their chairs, & hiding their yawns, which they know to be quite out of keeping with Gods & fumbling with their watches. (PA, 166)

This scene will reappear in many of Woolf’s novels. Despite the pleas of the many dancers at an evening ball in The Voyage Out, the local trio will refuse to play on:

After the lancers there was a waltz; after the waltz a polka; and then a terrible thing happened; the music, which had been sounding regularly with five-minute pauses, stopped suddenly. [...] Strange as it seemed, the musicians were pale and heavy-eyed; they looked bored and prosaic, as if the summit of their desire was cold meat and beer, succeeded immediately by bed. (VO, 163)

In The Waves, Rhoda will leave the Wigmore Hall, disgusted by the violinists as they return after the interval, “mopping their faces. They are no longer so spruce or so debonair” (W, 116). In The Years, Kitty will attend a performance of Wagner in Covent Garden but her attention will be distracted from the music itself by the badly made props and costumes which will break the illusion and finally bore her:24

24 cf. a remark made by Virginia Woolf in letter to Saxon Sydney-Turner in May 1925 about the scenery at a performance of Wagner’s “Walküre” in London: “The fire is terrible: I saw at once that it was made of red silk, and that used to be done quite satisfactorily” (L3: 186).
Then she put the opera-glasses to her eyes. The scenery suddenly became bright and close; the grass seemed to be made of thick green wool; she could see Siegfried's fat brown arms glistening with paint. His face was shiny. She put down the glasses and leant back in her corner. [...] She looked at the stage again. The Wanderer had come in. He was sitting on a bank in a long grey dressing-gown; a patch wobbled uncomfortably over one of his eyes. On and on he went; on and on. Her attention flagged. (Y, 198)

Even though this aspect of live performance was of interest to Virginia Woolf, she will often satirize the social implications of concert-going, in particular the snobbish attitude of the audiences who go for the social occasion, to be seen, rather than to listen to the music. When invited by Lady Londonderry to hear the French concert pianist and conductor Nadia Boulanger, Woolf will prefer to listen to the performance on the wireless because she “can’t bear music mixed with peerage” (L6: 301). The disrespectful and impolite behaviour of the audience will also be the subject of her criticism. In February 1915, she will note in her diary how she was “annoyed by a young man & woman next me who took advantage of the music to press each other’s hands; & read ‘A Shropshire Lad’ & look at some vile illustrations. And other people eat chocolates, & crumbled the silver paper into balls” (D1: 34). For these reasons, Virginia Woolf spent a lot of time listening to music in the less distracting surroundings of her sitting-room, whilst working over her literary projects – “a background to her musings, a theme for her pen” as Quentin Bell has put it - especially as Leonard Woolf shared her passion for music and professionally reviewed classical gramophone recordings for the Nation and Athenaeum, writing the “New Gramophone Records” column between 1926 and 1929. As Melba Cuddy-Keane pointed out, this allowed the Woolfs to have access to the best, most recent recordings available at that time. Leonard Woolf recalls indeed that his wife was “very fond of music and we used to listen to the wireless and gramophone – classical

25 "No good playing Schubert if one thinks L[eonard]. minds the noise" (30 March 1937, D5:73); “Then there was the sunset, & then some music on the new set” (17 Aug. 1938, D5: 161).
28 Melba Cuddy-Keane, op. cit., p. 74.
music – practically every night”,29 a routine which Virginia Woolf outlines in her diary:

And soon the bell will ring, & we shall dine & then we shall have some music, & I shall smoke a cigar; & then we shall read – La Fontaine I think tonight & the papers - & so to bed. (D3: 247)
The dear old repetitions soothe me again: L[eonard]; Pinka; dinner; tea; papers; music. (D4: 172)

The Woolfs will purchase one of the earliest commercial gramophones available at the time, described by Quentin Bell in his biography of Virginia Woolf as an “expensive model”,30 so much so that Ethel Smyth wished to come and listen to it.31 In 1925, Virginia Woolf will write in her diary that “we have the algaphone, & thats a heavenly prospect – music after dinner while I stitch at my woolwork [...]” (D3: 40).

Even before the age of the gramophone and as early as 1902, the Stephens had bought a pianola, which was quite rare as these instruments were particularly expensive at that time:32

The Pianola is flourishing, and plays after dinner till the other side (the Mackenzies [i.e. the next-door neighbours], who only do hand playing) are vanquished. Really it is a wonderful machine – beyond a machine in that it lets your own soul flow thro’. (L: 57)

John Maynard Keynes recalls indeed that

in the back part of the room there was an instrument called a Pianola, into which one put rolls of paper punctured by small holes. You bellowed with your feet and Beethoven or Wagner would appear. Anyone coming into the room might have thought that Adrian was a Paderewski – the effort on the bellows gave him a swaying

---

31 See *L*: 26, to Ethel Smyth, 29 Feb. 1932: “The wireless people are: - E.M.G. Gramophone. 11 Grape Street Shaftesbury Avenue. I think Eddy has one of their gramophones, which are far the best. and now we have added the wireless, also the best”; *L*:30, 8 March 1932: “L. says he could be in by 6.30 on Friday and would be pleased to play you Beethoven Opus. 31 No 3 if you would come punctual”.
32 *L*: 55, Sept. 1902, to Violet Dickinson.: “We have subscribed, and bought a Pianola!”, see also *PA*, 216-217, 4 Jan. 1905: “No letters of interest – nothing but a tune on the pianola, a Watts picture to hang, & an air of great cleanliness & emptiness”.

17
movement very like that of a great performer, and his hands were hidden. I do not remember that Virginia ever performed on this instrument, but it must have played a part in her life, for Adrian on coming home from work would play in the empty room by the hour.\textsuperscript{33}

Her gramophone records will become one her most cherished and prized possessions (\textit{D5}: 106). Comparing the impact on society of the invention of the motorcar with that of the gramophone, she will say in 1927, “we opened one little window when we bought the gramophone; now another opens with the motor” (\textit{D3}: 151).\textsuperscript{34} Later, the acquisition of a wireless will open new vistas as she will be able to hear live broadcasts of promenade concerts and music festivals, “mak[ing] a note to listen” to Ethel Smyth’s broadcasts (\textit{L5}: 96-97). She often had the gramophone or the wireless playing music as she wrote, switching it off when the music came to an end. Thus in 1931, she gives Ethel Smyth a humorous song by song account between brackets of a programme about Scottish folk songs to which she was listening on the BBC while writing her letter:

(The wireless is chanting Western European folk songs as I write – like a gale in the shrouds – Highland songs, the man says – sung by women while they shrink cloth. Lord how I’d like to write that kind of thing myself – but I wouldn’t wail so – why do ‘folk’ wail, always? Never a tune, always up and down, like a cats tail gliding over the kitchen floor. Do you like folk songs? To my thinking they’re the ruin of all modern music – just as Synge and Yeats ruined themselves with keening Celtic dirges.) [...] (Now they are singing the Earl of Moray; but still keening, though its a question of love, halters, dagger, in the snow, all bloody, as far as I can make out) [...] (Now they’re singing Jacobite ballads – rather better; more like a frothing horse and less like a cats tail) [...]  

\textsuperscript{34} The technological aspect of the wireless will be a constant source of amazement. In 1932, VW will be most interested in the mystical implications of the way a thunderstorm distorted the sound of Mozart during a live Promenade Concert transmission: “We had thunder at night of course, but not very tremendous, only enough to spoil the Promenade [Concert] to which we were listening. Odd – there was a crack of lightning over Caburn, and instantly Mozart went zigzag too. Modern life is a very complicated affair – why not some sudden revelation of the meaning of everything, one night? – I think it might happen” (\textit{L5}: 96).
and now Mr Middleton on pruning, whom we cut off, and so I must stop and to my oven. (L4: 406-407)35

However, listening to music whilst writing was more than a form of light entertainment or even just a pleasant way of working. Her diaries tell us that *The Waves* in particular was written “to the rhythm” of late Beethoven sonatas and quartets played on the gramophone (*D3*: 139; *D3*: 339). Without a gramophone, this would not have been possible or would have required hiring a live string quartet for instance, an idea which Virginia Woolf actually suggested in 1919 to the poet Sir Henry Newbolt as he also wished to write to the sound of music (*L2*: 344). The gramophone was thus, for Virginia Woolf, a working tool, impregnating the atmosphere of the room with certain textures and rhythms which she then sought to capture in her novels. When we recall that Virginia Woolf spoke of “the vast possibilities that lie within the power of rhythm” (‘Street Music’, 1905, *E1*: 31), such comments cannot be taken lightly since for her, “style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can’t use the wrong words” (*L3*: 247). She also listened to random live performances broadcast by the BBC from the Royal Albert Hall or by foreign radio channels and will thus note in 1931 how certain pieces would upset her concentration and affect her style: “the loudspeaker is pouring forth Wagner from Paris. His rhythm destroys my rhythm; yes, thats a true observation. All writing is nothing but putting words on the backs of rhythm. If they fall off the rhythm one’s done —” (*L4*: 303). At the end of the piece, she will breathe a sigh of relief, noting, “thank God, Wagner has stopped murmuring among the forest leaves, and I’m my own mistress again.” (*L4*: 304-305). Interestingly, already in 1900, the sound of the bells of a nearby church had strongly affected Virginia’s writing who remarked to Emma Vaughan, how “my metaphors are jangled out of tune by St Mary Abbotts bells, which insist upon calling for parishioners all morning” (*L1*:35).

Virginia Woolf undoubtedly had a fair share of technical musical knowledge as her affinities for music go far back into her youth, when, in the Stephen household, music took an important place. The references to musical terms in her diary show us

---

that she was far from being musically illiterate\textsuperscript{36} and she didn’t refrain from making acute criticism of the interpretations of the performers she used to hear. In January 1905, she will find the “Eroica disappointing” (\textit{PA}, 226) whereas a concert of Beethoven, Wagner, Weber and Brahms conducted by Fritz Steinbach with soloist Maud MacCarthy will lead her to write in her diary that it was “one of the best concerts I have heard lately – a really good violinist & first rate orchestra & conductor, & they played Beethoven and Brahms. Needless to say, Queens Hall was practically empty, & I had a choice of excellent seats” (\textit{PA}, 234). In April 1918, she went to a concert at the Palladium, and noted in her diary, “I regretted it. A man called Julian Clifford played Mozart as if it were a Dream Waltz, slowly & sentimentally & with a kind of lugubrious stickiness which spoilt my pleasure in the G. Minor” (\textit{D1}: 142). The “Mcnaghton 4tet” will also disappoint her: “they play too slowly” (\textit{L6}: 54).

Often she used to remember people by the way they played. Of Vere Isham, she will recall how “there is no picture in my mind that gives me more pleasure than that of him reading and rereading Thackeray and playing a tune on the Cello in between whiles” (\textit{L1}: 31). In 1908, she will admit not being able to remember her cousin Helen Stephen, “except once, when we asked if she could play, and she strummed through a Beethoven Sonata, with the tramp of a regiment of dragoons” (\textit{L1}: 342-343). Their house in Kensington had a grand piano,\textsuperscript{37} which pianist Emma Vaughan, one of Woolf’s cousins and a close friend, used to come and play on until she left England to go on to study music in Dresden, to the utter disappointment of Virginia Woolf who complained to her in a letter that “my old piano must be almost dumb by this time – you know it had a tendency that way – so few people play on it now” (\textit{L1}: 41). As well as the piano, they also possessed a harmonium on which Virginia Woolf, when she was 17 years old, used to play fugues with her sister Vanessa (\textit{L1}: 5), certainly contradicting both Leonard Woolf’s and Clive Bell’s assumptions that she had no

\textsuperscript{36} There are several allusions in her diaries to musical techniques which she obviously was familiar with, even though the underlying irony of her remarks will show that she will not be particularly enthralled by musical analysis as such: “They have all gone to hear a concert at Gordon Square. I resisted, and now try to think that they’ll all be a gabbling of fundamental realities and essential chords, which I should loathe.” \textit{L1}: 491, 5 March 1912; see also: “Out after lunch with Gurth to get tickets for the Joachim concert at the Bechstein Hall, where Gurth accompanied a Lalo’s song with a voluntary bass of his own composition & I had to remove him in haste” \textit{PA}: 271, 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1905; “N[essa] and A[ngelica]. discussing 4/8 time.” \textit{D5}: 25, 21 June 1936, etc.

\textsuperscript{37} see Hermione Lee, \textit{Virginia Woolf.} Reading: Vintage, 1997, p. 33.
technical knowledge of music.\textsuperscript{38} Her sister Stella played the violin in “Mrs Marshall’s orchestra”, and her mother Julia Stephen, who used to teach the children since they did not go to school, was an accomplished pianist. When she was eleven years old, Stella noted in her diary that “Ginia” was learning music and she herself was sight-reading Beethoven sonatas.\textsuperscript{39} Virginia Woolf’s music lessons were far from satisfactory and no doubt contributed to a certain disillusionment with the musical profession. Vanessa, in her recollections of Virginia’s childhood will remember the music lessons in particular as they both were given piano and singing lessons:

Music naturally, since we were girls, had to be drummed into us, and the piano mistress succeeded in reducing us to complete boredom. The singing class, on the other hand, had its amusing side in the shape of other children. Miss Mills, a well known teacher of the tonic sol-fa system in those days, was discovered by us to be intensely religious.\textsuperscript{40}

It hardly seems surprising considering her own experience that Virginia Woolf will be very critical of formal musical education and will value a non-technical approach to this art, often satirizing any “priggish” attitude to music. In Jacob’s Room, Mrs Durrant will lament that people are not taught properly about music, but at the same time she manifests a most pretentious attitude to the music of Bach, whereas Jacob Flanders appreciates the music for what it is and not because he has been told that Bach’s music represents the \textit{summum} of musical art:

“Now Elsbeth is going to sing again. Clara is playing her accompaniment or turning over for Mr. Carter, I think. No, Mr. Carter is playing by himself—This is \textit{Bach},” she whispered, as Mr. Carter played the first bars.

“Are you fond of music?” said Mrs. Durrant.

“Yes. I like hearing it,” said Jacob. “I know nothing about it.”

\textsuperscript{39} cf. Stella Duckworth’s unpublished diary extracts in Hermione Lee, \textit{Virginia Woolf}, op.cit., p. 33: “21 August: Children began lessons. Ginia did her music. Then Ginia, Adrian and I went to town to buy rum, muslim [the rum was for bug-hunting, not for drinking] […]. Tried some Beethoven sonatas”. Concerning the Stephens’ acquaintance with the Marshalls (in general), see Virginia Woolf, \textit{PA}: 233.
“Very few people do that,” said Mrs. Durrant. “I daresay you were never taught. Why is that, Sir Jasper?—Sir Jasper Bigham—Mr. Flanders. Why is nobody taught anything that they ought to know, Sir Jasper?” (JR, 87-88)

A very similar scene occurs at the end of Mrs Dalloway, Clarissa being described as a musical “prig” who “loved Bach”:

She said she loved Bach. So did Hutton. That was the bond between them, and Hutton (a very bad poet) always felt that Mrs. Dalloway was far the best of the great ladies who took an interest in art. It was odd how strict she was. About music she was purely impersonal. She was rather a prig. But how charming to look at! She made her house so nice if it weren’t for her Professors. Clarissa had half a mind to snatch him off and set him down at the piano in the back room. For he played divinely.

“But the noise!” she said. “The noise!” (Mrs D, 194)

In The Voyage Out, Woolf’s heroine, pianist Rachel Vinrace, “finding her teachers inadequate [...] , practically taught herself” and as a result, “at the age of twenty-four she knew as much about music as most people do when they are thirty; and could play as well as nature allowed her to, which, as became daily more obvious, was a really generous allowance” (VO, 30). Terence Hewet, on his side, will make wry comments about his own professors who failed to encourage and develop his musical talent:

‘My musical gift was ruined [...] by the village organist at home, who had invented a system of notation which he tried to teach me, with the result that I never got to the tune playing at all.’ (VO, 222)

Susan will not get to the “tune playing” either in The Waves, and she will symbolically bury her hated piano teacher who only made her practise scales:

This shiny pebble is Madame Carlo, and I will bury her deep because of her fawning and ingratiating manners, because of the sixpence she gave me for keeping my knuckles flat when I played my scales. (W, 32)

Despite her lack of technical proficiency, Virginia Woolf will continue for some years to play and to sing. In 1903, she used to improvise “musical evenings” with her
brother Adrian, trying out different pieces on the pianola and noting to their great pleasure and amusement how their servants reacted to the different musical styles, prefiguring perhaps Woolf's idea that "all crime and quarrelling would soon be unknown, and the work of the hand and the thoughts of the mind would flow melodiously in obedience to the laws of music" ('Street Music', E1: 32):

A fresh lot of tunes came today chosen by Adrian and a very mixed set – Bach and Schumann and the Washington Post, and the Dead March in Saul, and Pinafore and the Messiah. We find the difference in quality a very good thing because all our servants sit beneath the open drawing room window all the evening while we play – and by experiment we have discovered that if we play dance music all their crossnesses vanish and the whole room rings with their shrieks and then we tame them down so sentimentally with Saul or boredom with Schumann – on the whole their silence is the most desirable thing. (L1: 88)

She never gave up singing altogether. In 1908, Clive Bell must have taunted Virginia Woolf, then Stephen, with the notion that she was incapable of singing a song from a score and sent her one on a card. In answer, she humorously wrote to Vanessa that "by this mornings post, too, I got a card, with musical hieroglyphs; halfway through breakfast, I sang my song to keep myself in spirits, and saw it, as though in a mirror before me – mocking me. I at once changed my tune, and sang the second song, which no one knows. Tell the Chipmonk [Clive Bell] his malice is thwarted; I sang for half an hour, and all the house crouched on the step to listen" (L1: 348-349). Even as late as 1917, Quentin Bell sent her a Hugo Wolf song which she attempted to sight-read ("I tried to sing the Wolf song this morning, tell Quentin" L2:184) but this was perhaps more of a joke on the homophonous sounding Wolf/Woolf than a gift by Quentin to Virginia Woolf the singer.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of her musical education and her subsequent self-confessed "amateur" approach,41 music was more than just a pleasant pastime. Music was an art which she found directly inspired her own literary compositions, playing a central role in her work as a writer. As she will exclaim in 1924, planning to go to the Wigmore Hall and listen to a recital given by the Portuguese cellist

41 It must be kept in mind that even Virginia Woolf's approach to literature itself was that of the "common reader" (cf. her essay, 'The Common Reader', E4: 19).
Guilhermina Suggia and pianist Jose Viana da Mota, "its music I want; to stimulate & suggest" (D2: 320). From an author who felt that "the only thing in this world is music - music and books and one or two pictures" (L1: 41), it is not surprising that she showed throughout her life a considerable interest in the relations between music and literature to such an extent that she planned to write a book on the subject,42 a project which unfortunately was curtailed by her sudden death in 1941. From a letter to one of her most intimate friends, the composer Ethel Smyth, we learn that in December 1940, Woolf wanted "to investigate the influence of music on literature" (L6: 450):

Why dont you write a Common Reader review of music? Now consider that. Write your loves and hates for Bach Wagner etc out in plain English. I have an ulterior motive. I want to investigate the influence of music on literature. (L6: 450)43

In preparation for this, she was reading the musical criticisms of contemporary music analysts Donald Tovey and Hubert Parry, both of whom she had met on several occasions.44 She did not however find their approach satisfactory, which led her to remark to Ethel Smyth,

but there’s not a book on music that gives me a hint – Parry all padding. What about Tovey? Too metaphysical. (L6:450)

She was also very much familiar with the works of W. H. Hadow, the editor of the 1905 Oxford History of Music which Woolf reviewed for the Guardian. Gerald Levin has furthermore suggested that Woolf, who personally knew the music critic J. W. N.

42 It is possibly that Woolf’s projected study of music and literature was in fact to be a part of her “Common History” project, of which only two draft chapters were written, ‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’ (see below)
43 Unfortunately, this letter is incomplete and the last pages are missing.
44 Virginia Woolf had often seen Tovey conduct Ethel Smyth’s scores as well as heard his own music performed. On the other hand, Parry had lived across from Virginia Stephen’s home in Kensington, cf. L4: 254: "Did you know of Parry, who wrote a March, which in some circles supplanted Mendelssohn? Of course you did; and he had two daughters; and one was Gwen and the other was Dolly. The sound of their violins used to float across Kensington Square". Concerning Tovey, whom she knew more than Parry, she notes in her diary: “One of my most vivid memories is of Toveys boredom. We crossed a small bridge at Eton together – the Cloisters, the MacCarthys wedding; and he was facetious about prodding the arch of the bridge with an umbrella; also floamed at the corner of the lips; also irresistibly reminded me, to look at, of cold fowl, such as comes up at Sunday supper covered with a thick white paste. his own music struck me stiff with horror; but I accept all you say about his playing of Bach, and shall go to hear him. (L4: 344) See also L4: 356 and this letter to Ethel Smyth: “I heard Tovey’s quartet last night, and liked it. Right or wrong? (L5:378).
Sullivan, may well have read his 1927 study of Beethoven’s late quartets even though there is no actual evidence of this.\textsuperscript{45} The Woolfs possessed several books about musical theory and history, some of which had been printed by the Hogarth Press itself, some may have been bought by Leonard Woolf to help with his own reviewing, or some may have been sent to the Woolfs to be reviewed and there is no evidence to show that Virginia Woolf herself had ever read them. Nevertheless, on their shelves was Robert H. Hull’s 1927 volume on \textit{Contemporary Music}, Basil De Selincourt’s \textit{The Enjoyment of Music} (1928), the two volumes of \textit{An Outline of Musical History}, by Thomas J. Hewitt and Ralph Hill (1929), \textit{The Story of Music: an Historical Sketch of the Changes in Musical Form} (1927) by Paul Bekker, \textit{Studies and Caprices} (1926) by Alexander Brent Smith and \textit{Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy} by Vernon Lee (1880) and Wakeling Dry’s \textit{Chopin - The Music of the Masters} (1926).\textsuperscript{46} Ethel Smyth herself was a writer Woolf much admired - “what a gift you have as a writer”, she will write to Smyth in September 1930 (\textit{L4}: 217) - and who was to publish several volumes of autobiography, herself thinking of writing in terms of music, as Virginia Woolf will note in her diary:

\begin{quote}

    she says writing music is like writing novels. One thinks of the sea – naturally one gets a phrase for it. Orchestration is colouring. And one has to be very careful with one’s ‘technique’. (\textit{D3}: 291-292)
\end{quote}

Attesting to the fact that both women undoubtedly spoke about music and the relations between music and literature, Woolf described their friendship as “one of the strangest aesthetic experiences I have ever had” (\textit{L4}: 214), exclaiming in a letter to Ethel Smyth that “I want to talk and talk and talk – about music” (\textit{L4}: 145) and “exchange ideas” (\textit{L6}: 454). The idea that there was a strong link between literature and music was not new to Virginia Woolf: in 1905, in an essay entitled ‘Street Music’, she reflected on the fact that “the art of writing [...] is nearly allied to the art of music, and is chiefly degenerate because it has forgotten its allegiance” (\textit{E1}: 31), music itself belonging to the “Gods” and having a “power over us [...] whenever we


give ourselves up to its sway that no picture, however fair, or words however stately, can approach" (*E1*: 30).47 That same year, she had “got a book about the relations of poetry & music, which may come in useful for my Morley lectures” (*PA*, 221). In 1925, in her essay, ‘Pictures’, she deplores the lack of a serious study on “The Loves of the Arts”, the mutual influence of literature, music, painting and architecture:

Probably some Professor has written a book on the subject, but it has not come our way. ‘The Loves of the Arts’ – that is more or less the title it would bear, and it would be concerned with the flirtations between music, letters, sculpture, and architecture, and the effects that the arts have had upon each other throughout the ages. (‘Pictures’, *E4*: 243)

In 1928, Woolf attended a musical and theatrical performance at the A.D.C. theatre in Cambridge with scenery designed by Bloomsbury artist Duncan Grant who was, at that time, living with Woolf’s sister, Vanessa. Woolf was particularly attentive to the relations between the musical, visual and narrative aspects of this evening of “unusual exhilaration” (‘Plays and Pictures’, *E4*: 564) which included Stravinsky’s 1918 collaborative work with author C.F. Ramuz, *Histoire du Soldat*, usually performed by seven musicians, a dancer (in this case, Lydia Lopokova), two actors and a narrator.48 It was to “suggest” to Virginia Woolf “how curiously the sister arts might illustrate each other if they chose” (‘Plays and Pictures’, *E4*: 564). In 1930, Virginia Woolf had even thought of becoming the publisher of a “broadsheet” on “Art, politics, Lit., music” (*D3*: 292), a project which did not however go ahead. That music was an essential facet of Modernist literature49 led her, in January 1931, to complain of the modern education of young writers, who “took service under their teachers instead of riding into battle alone”, with the result that only dull unadventurous and predictable books are produced, leading her to ask, “turning over the honest, the admirable, the entirely sensible and unsentimental pages, where is love? Meaning by that, where is the sound of the sea and the red of the rose; where is music, imagery, and a voice speaking from the heart?” (‘All About Books’, 1931, *CE2*: 267). Indeed, for Virginia

---

47 see also Virginia Woolf’s 1903 sketches, “Dance in Queen’s Gate” and “A Garden Dance” in *PA*: 164-167 and 169-172.
49 see Appendix 1 for an overview of the relation between music and painting in the Modernist era
Woolf, "all great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain" ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 241):

What poet sets pen to paper without first hearing a tune in his head? And the prose-writer, though he makes believe to walk soberly, in obedience to the voice of reason, excites us by perpetual changes of rhythm following the emotions with which he deals. ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 242)

Speaking about literary criticism in particular, the “best critics” of literature should be “acutely aware of the mixture of elements,” and write “of literature with music and painting in their minds” ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 242) rather than keep blinkers on their eyes and ignore the profound interdisciplinary nature of Modernist literature:

nowadays we are all so specialized that critics keep their brains fixed to the print, which accounts for the starved condition of criticism in our time, and the attenuated and partial manner in which it deals with its subject” ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 242).

Virginia Woolf will thus constantly return throughout her life to the idea that the arts go hand in hand and she will argue that the “gifts” of music, painting and writing “should go together; all three are perhaps needed to complete each one” ('Coleridge as Critic', E2: 223). Among artists, she distinguishes those who “bore deeper and deeper into the stuff of their own art” from the “hybrids” who are “always making raids into the lands of others” ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 243). From her own experience, she finds that very often, when novelists do turn to the other arts, they never can appreciate them in their own right but are always “after something that may be helpful to themselves”, finding themselves “stimulated” and “excited” by the need to say in words what these other “wordless” arts, music par excellence but also certain more abstract or unrepresentative styles of painting, express with such ease ('Pictures', E4:245). Interestingly she calls these arts, the “silent” arts, silent because they do not rely on words and language to communicate their meaning, even though music is far from “silent”. The “silent painters, Cézanne and Mr Sickert” ('Pictures', E4:245) in particular, will never fail to fascinate her and arouse her aesthetic appreciation. Admiring Cézanne’s Provençal landscapes, she will describe what is probably one of his paintings of the Montagne Sainte Victoire near Aix-en-Provence (see Figure 2.
below), as “a rocky landscape, all cleft in ridges of opal colour as if by a giant’s hammer, silent, solid, serene” (‘Pictures’, E4:245). Significantly, Roger Fry was to find the “plastic idiom” of Cézanne’s style of painting profoundly “musical”,50 “the artist play[ing] upon us by the rhythm of line, by colour, by abstract form, and by the quality of the matter he employs”.51 He indeed argued that Cézanne’s works achieved the “deep and inexpressible eloquence” of a “visual symphony” by “remov[ing] objects from our world” and “transpos[ing] [them] into a purely spiritual world [...] by means of their harmonies and contrasts”.52 Woolf herself will compare her own style of writing to that of the then-contemporary Post-Impressionists,53 writing to Duncan Grant, “like all painters, your sense of words is plastic, not linear, and I am on the side of the plastic myself” (L6: 302).

Figure 2. Paul Cézanne, Le Mont Sainte-Victoire vu de la Carrière Bibemus (c. 1898)54

There is no doubt that Roger Fry in particular influenced Woolf’s aesthetics of art. “Thanks Roger”, Woolf will one day write, “I’m now seeing in chairs pictures tapestries a remote world of inexplicable significance” (L6: 294). Virginia Woolf will find that the works of Cézanne

stir words in us where we had not thought words to exist; suggest forms where we had never seen anything but thin air. As we gaze, words begin to raise their feeble limbs in

51 Roger Fry, ‘Post Impressionism’ (1911), op.cit., p. 105.
54 Oil on Canvas, held at The Baltimore Museum of Art (picture downloaded from http://www.explo-cezanne.com).
the pale border land of no man’s language, to sink down again in despair. We fling them like nets upon a rocky and inhospitable shore; they fade and disappear. It is vain, it is futile; but we can never resist the temptation. (‘Pictures’, E4: 245)

Tempted though, she certainly was. More than painting, music never failed both to inspire and frustrate her, as even the painter’s “musical phrasing, his rhythm of line, colour, and plane” and the “pure effects of line, colour, and form” of the most abstract of Post-Impressionist paintings failed to achieve for many people the intensity of “the effect of pure sound”.55 Upon hearing the music of Wagner in 1909, Virginia Woolf felt herself irresistibly drawn back to her own art as the sounds of Parsifal “melt[ed] into colour, and colour call[ed] out for words”. When the spell of the performance was over, “how great is the joy with which we turn to our old tools again!” even though, just as words failed her to describe the effect of Cézanne’s paintings, “in the meantime, we are miserably aware how little words can do to render music” (E1: 291-292). Opera, of course, was of great interest to Woolf as an example of melopoetic art, combining both music and literature, and she will find that Parsifal “slides from music to words almost imperceptibly”, moving her almost to tears (L1: 406). Most importantly, this musical experience will lead her to try and capture the same effect in her writing, “I have been niggling at the effect all the morning, without much success” (L1: 406-407). In 1927, Virginia Woolf will write in her essay ‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, that the aim of the novel of the future was to “dramatise some of those influences which play so large a part in life, yet have so far escaped the novelist” (E4: 439). What she terms “the power of music” lies first on her list.

It is not surprising therefore that music is woven into the very fabric of her writings, musical performances and musicians featuring in most of her fiction. In her first novel, The Voyage Out, music will play a most explicit, argumentative and thematic role but in later works, it will be taken as an implicit formal and structural model. Her first heroine, Rachel Vinrace is a pianist. Cassandra, in her second novel, Night and Day, will love the music of Mozart and play his arias on the flute. Most of Woolf’s novels feature or refer to Wagnerian opera, Parsifal in The Voyage Out,56 Tristan and Isolde in Jacob’s Room, Siegfried in The Years. Wagner’s notion of “Gesamtkunstwerk” is briefly scrutinized in Night and Day. Several short stories

55 Roger Fry, ‘Post Impressionism’ (1911), op.cit., p. 105.  
56 we shall study in a separate chapter the possible covert influence of Parsifal in The Waves.
revolve round music, ‘The String Quartet’, ‘A Simple Melody’ and ‘Slater’s Pins have no Points’ in particular. *Between the Acts*, her last novel, dramatizes a village pageant, complete with singing, dancing and a medley of music played on a gramophone. Virginia Woolf did also admit deliberately attempting some formal musicalization, even though the influence of music was perhaps at times more of a subconscious process. We know for instance, that the music played by Leonard on the gramophone brings to her mind ‘The Moths’ (which was to become *The Waves*), a novel which was particularly associated with music in her subsequent diary entries and which she had originally sketched “when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas” (*D3*: 139). In November 1928, Woolf will thus note:

The Moths still haunts me, coming, as they always do, unbidden, between tea & dinner, while L. plays the gramophone. I shape a page or two; & make myself stop. Indeed I am up against some difficulties. (*D3*: 209)

More significantly perhaps, two years later, when *The Waves* is nearly completed, she apparently solves the problem of the ending of the novel while listening to Beethoven:

It occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech, & end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes, & having no further break. This is also to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: & personality: & defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion. (*D3*: 339)

One of Woolf’s planned titles for her subsequent novel, *The Years*, was to be “Music”.57 As with *The Waves*, she turned to a musical notion to work out an ending for the novel, at the time still called ‘Here & Now’:

I am thinking all the time of what is to end Here & Now. *I want a Chorus*. a general statement. *a song for 4 voices*. how am I to get it? I am now almost within sight of the end. racing along: becoming more & more dramatic.

---

57 “I think I see the end of Here & Now (or Music, or Dawn or whatever I shall call it)” (*D4*: 237)
And how to make the transition from the colloquial to the lyrical, from the particular to the general? (D4: 236, my italics)

Interestingly, ten days later, on the 17th of August 1934, with the musical model obviously still in her mind since that was the date she thought of changing the title to ‘Music’, Woolf will continue by outlining this “musical” ending in more detail, describing it as “a supper party in the downstairs room”, “all in speeches – no play” (D4:237). This parallels Woolf’s musical conception of the ending of Mrs Dalloway:

There I am now – at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, & climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated spirited solid piece, knitting together everything & ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa. Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, & Sally Seton perhaps: but I don’t want to tie myself down to that yet. Now I do think this might be the best of my endings, & come off, perhaps. (D2: 312, my italics)

Finally, when speaking of her biography of her life-long friend, the renowned art-critic and painter Roger Fry, a work of erudition which had taxed her patience and creative energy, Virginia Woolf will admit in an answer to a letter by a very old friend of hers, Elizabeth Trevelyan, that she had relied on the sonata-form to give a structure to the biography:

there was such a mass of detail that the only way I could hold it together was by abstracting it into themes. I did try to state them in the first chapter, and then to bring in developments and variations, and then to make them all heard together and end by bringing back the first theme in the last chapter. Just as you say, I am extraordinarily

58 Woolf had indeed felt limited by the critical eyes of Roger Fry’s family and friends who would eventually read the book and the multiplicity of facts she had to include (Virginia Woolf will complain of the boxes of letters, books and reviews which Roger Fry’s family showered upon her, cf. L6: 374) had constantly checked her creative energy:

It wasn’t only the difficulty of making quotations fit - so many things had to be muted, or only hinted. And there is always a certain constraint, which one doesn’t feel in fiction, a sense of other people looking over one’s shoulder. (L6: 426)

See a letter to Lady Simon: “I’m glad you got a glimpse of Roger Fry. If I could have shirked all the relations, I might have said more” (L6: 464); cf. also a letter to R. C. Trevelyan: “The difficulties, as you say, were immense. Often I almost gave up in despair. I was so hampered by family feelings (though the Fry’s have been very kind) and then the mass of letters was bewildering” (L6: 412), and to David Cecil: “There’s so much one can’t say, and so much one mustn’t say. Though the Fry’s were very good, I always felt them in the background” (L6:426).
pleased that you felt this. No one else has I think. And I dont wonder, for I was often crushed under the myriad details. (L6: 426)

Strangely enough, despite these explicit remarks on Woolf’s musicalization of Roger Fry, no critics bar Peter Jacobs have as yet paid any attention to her musical handling of Roger Fry or shown any interest in what we consider as the wider-reaching implications of Woolf’s musical conception of this biography. As Woolf herself noted, critics do not consider Roger Fry to be “musical” since it seemed to be at the other end of the literary spectrum, on the side of facts rather than art and it is evident that what pleased Virginia Woolf so much in 1940 was that Elizabeth Trevelyan had remarked upon the musicality of a work of non-fiction. The fact that Virginia Woolf considered Roger Fry to have been inspired by music as much as The Waves, the work which most scholars and critics compare to music as well as her other novels, is however particularly significant. It shows us indeed that her conception of the relation between music and literature goes far beyond a poetical type of linguistic or stylistic musicality, whose place in a biography such as Roger Fry would not be obvious.

How far any of this may be a reflection on a significant and novel type of musicalization of fiction remains to be seen. The fact remains that the musicalization of fiction was in one way or another never very far from Woolf’s thoughts on writing. In the case of Roger Fry, Woolf’s understanding of sonata-form could certainly be perceived in some musicological quarters as rather simplistic, as may seem Woolf’s conception of the musicalization of the ending of Mrs Dalloway or The Years, in particular the transposition of her notion of writing a “song for 4 voices” into a dialogue between the various voices of the characters at a dinner party. To what extent a “dialogue” may be constructively compared to a “song” can indeed be subject to debate. We shall of course be arguing these points below. In the case of the potential musicalization of The Waves, the issue is more complex. We do not know which Beethoven quartet and which movement(s) Woolf was listening to, neither do we know what, in the quartet’s expression, style or structure, potentially aroused her imagination nor which part of the ending of The Waves Woolf had in mind. Possibly even, the music did not actually play any role at all in inspiring her at that precise

moment, or, as I have said before, influenced her imagination subconsciously. It certainly seems possible to read any number of things into Woolf’s words. On the other hand, on the strength of Woolf’s comments, *The Waves* could also certainly be treated as a possible deliberate and conscious musicalization of fiction, as its structure does, as we shall see below, have striking parallels with certain musical forms, in particular if we bear in mind that music plays a role in the novel itself, as well as the fact that Woolf’s general literary aesthetics, as outlined in her writings, rely quite heavily on musical metaphors and analogies. We shall of course return at greater length elsewhere to the implications and import of Woolf’s thoughts on the influence of music on her style, in *The Waves* in particular, as this novel demands a chapter of its own.

**b. Intentionality, music and impersonality**

How far, we must ask ourselves, is a book influenced by its writer’s life – how far is it safe to let the man interpret the writer? How far shall we resist or give way to the sympathies and antipathies that the man himself rouses in us – so sensitive are words, so receptive of the character of the author? (‘How should one read a book?’, *CE2*: 5)

It is necessary to ask ourselves at this point how far any of these comments should be treated with serious consideration, leading us to define what we mean ourselves when we speak of the musicalization of fiction: in which way may we be unwittingly reading our own interests in the musicalization of fiction into Virginia Woolf’s prose? What Woolf’s comments on her musical conception of *The Waves* reveal - or even more so, her explicit intention of giving a musical structure to *Roger Fry* - is how the problem of intentionality is central to our particular interdisciplinary investigation. A study of the musicalization of fiction immediately leads us to ask, to what extent should this musicalization of fiction be explicitly recognizable as such in the text itself or be deduced from other sources. To what extent can the musicalization be the result of a subconscious integration of the expressive modalities of musical performance and composition, and as we shall see below, to what extent did Virginia Woolf possibly deliberately obscure this musicalization of her novels, music itself as we shall see, being for her a model for an impersonal style of writing? Finally and
most importantly, what bearing would an implicit musicalization of fiction have upon the aesthetic purport of the works in question, supposing one may indeed convincingly bring it to light in the first place?

Diane Gillespie, at the forefront of contemporary research into Woolf's "multiple muses" will give a word of warning that

recognizing the advantage of having access to so much potentially corroborating material, however, is not to imply that Woolf always accomplished in her own art what she said she attempted, or that she transformed into words everything to which she was exposed.60

In the same vein, leading interdisciplinary scholar Werner Wolf will assert that "even in the case of unmistakable authorial self-interpretations or self-stylizations the general question arises as to the reliability of such testimonies".61 Wolf, in a chapter dealing with the "Types of evidence and criteria for identifying musicalized fiction", will give an outline of the various parameters involved in determining the type of "musicalization" in question, speaking in particular of the problematical nature of the "circumstantial" or "contextual evidence", those "peripheral documents and facts" which are "outside the text under discussion", but which sometimes are the only sources we have for determining an otherwise implicit musicalization dans le texte. These peripheral, authorial documents are certainly of interest, in particular for the "few specialists" but, for Werner Wolf, they have only a reduced general "indicative value"62 as to the actual texts under scrutiny. In true postmodernist fashion, it could certainly be endlessly argued that the readers (and critics) should mainly be concerned with interpreting the novels in themselves and for themselves, regardless of the author's intentions. The problem of authorial intention is a tricky affair and is often seen to make or break literary criticism, depending on whether one vouches for a more traditional interpretation of literary texts or on the contrary, if one is firmly

---

60 See Diane F. Gillespie, 'Introduction', in Gillespie (ed.), op.cit., p. 3.
entrenched in the anti-intentionalist camp, thus following in the footsteps of the so-called New Critics. Proponents of the latter theory, Monroe Beardsley and William K. Wimsatt famously stated in 1946, in an essay entitled ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art”. More recently, Roland Barthes notoriously argued for “the death of the author” in his discussion of the hermeneutic value of the “multidimensional space” of what should be seen as an autotelic literary text, i.e. open to as many interpretations as there are readings. Interestingly, he traces the progressive dissolution of authorial authority back to the new literary trends of Virginia Woolf’s time (referring to the aesthetics of Mallarmé), which “utterly transform[ed] the Modern text” as it is seen to give a performance of its own:

For Mallarmé, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a pre-existing impersonality — never to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist — that point where language alone acts, ‘performs,’ and not ‘oneself’: Mallarmé’s entire poetics consists in suppressing the author for the sake of the writing (which is, as we shall see, to restore the status of the reader).

It is needless to say that we cannot go much further into the details of all the literary theories and counter-theories which deal with the relevance (or not) of taking into account the author’s intentions, nor can we provide any in-depth investigation into the philosophical, linguistic and epistemological aspects of the question as they would draw us too far away from our subject. How we shall safely navigate through the turbulent waters of the Scylla and Charybdis of text versus author will be determined by our interdisciplinary framework and the fact that Virginia Woolf herself approaches the subject of impersonality from a musical perspective, thus putting the

---

67 For an overview, see Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels two articles ‘Against Theory’ (Critical Inquiry, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer 1982). pp. 723-742) and ‘Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction’ (Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn 1987). pp. 49-68.)
issue at the heart of our enquiry. It seems indeed that the particular nature of our interdisciplinary investigation can only benefit from an ambivalent view on the subject of intentionality which will enable us to take into account Virginia Woolf's thoughts on the potential relations between music and literature, in themselves of great interest, without, in doing so, in any way limiting the scope of our investigation. Our primary object remains a study of Virginia Woolf's particular melopoetic experiments: the musicalization of fiction in her novels and the resulting aesthetic implications. It would indeed certainly be difficult, if not to say unreasonable, to study music in relation to Woolf's literary works without any reference to Woolf's own views as to the role and place of music in her life and her writing, enabling us to put a break on what Steven Paul Scher calls "the perils of overinterpretation or overreading", which show "how easily unbridled theorizing can cause an entire interpretive edifice to collapse"\(^{68}\) and which is one of the major drawbacks of so-called "interdisciplinary" research.\(^{69}\) As Scher will assert, only a "cross-disciplinary exploration" that documents the author's "awareness, reflections, opinions, judgements, and creative reception of contemporary current thoughts, based on solid textual and biographical evidence rather than on unbridled fancy"\(^{70}\) will enable us to solidly ground our research by critically taking into account the substantial biographical and literary data provided in Woolf's diaries (which she wrote all her life long) and letters (over two thousand in number, including a certain number of those addressed in the 1930s to her friend, the feminist composer Ethel Smyth), especially as these texts are not only a source of information as to her thoughts and tastes, but are also particularly relevant in connection with a study of her artistic and aesthetic


\(^{69}\) These views on authorial intentionality raise however far more complex problems than we have space to go into, in particular concerning a familiar bone of contention: the subjective versus the objective in literary criticism. As Knapp and Michaels have pointed out, "some have gone on to argue that the unattainability of an epistemologically neutral stance not only undermines the claims of the method but prevents us from ever getting any correct interpretations. For these writers the attack on method thus has important practical consequences for literary criticism, albeit negative ones" See Knapp and Michaels 'Against Theory', *op.cit.*, p. 737.

interest in music as source of inspiration.71 Diane Gillespie will highlight the advantage which Woolf scholars have in particular as

the abundance of diary, letter, and memoir material enables scholars to consider more knowledgeably than in the cases of most writers Woolf's contacts with various art forms and her diverse responses to them. Her historical and biographical connections with other art forms and artists assures readers with painterly or musical orientations that they are not just imagining such qualities in Woolf's writing. That we as readers inevitably recreate texts in our own images is one of the tenets of contemporary criticism [...]. Yet, although people with certain interests will perceive what those with different ones will not, what they perceive is there, traceable in the records of Woolf's life.72

Not only do these texts thus provide precious insight into Virginia Woolf's understanding and appreciation of the art of music in relation to her own work but also, more importantly, they reveal what she sees as an essential complementarity between modern literature and music, specifically in relation to her own modes of writing. Throughout our investigation, we shall thus endeavour to establish a balance between the texts themselves, what we wish to highlight within those texts and the author's own intentions as given in the paratextual materials. We shall bear in mind Monroe Beardsley's words, that "it still seems [...] that evidence of what the author intended, although it may be helpful in construing the text he wrote, can neither override nor supplement what the text tells us when approached with the appropriate rules and conventions."73 In the musical domain, Peter Kivy argues similarly that the composer's intentions should in all cases be evaluated "not merely by the sincerity or vehemence of their expression but by a reasonable estimate of the enterprise itself",74 and he will continue by asserting that if the enterprise itself fails to live up to the composer's intentions, these should accordingly be critically rejected as "irrelevant"75 to the investigation of the actual works. Very often though, in the interdisciplinary

71 For a complete bibliography of Virginia Woolf's works, see A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf, by B.J. Kirkpatrick, op.cit.
75 ibid.
sphere, the paratextual material comes to play a very important role. One of the reasons for this has been explained by Melvin Friedman. Speaking of what he sees as Huxley and Gide’s failed attempts at the musicalization of fiction and this despite the voiced assertions to the contrary of the authors themselves, Friedman raises the point that very often, the novelists themselves are at fault as “it is often the writer’s prejudice to appear adept at more than one art”. With only a “lay writer’s knowledge of music”, they nevertheless try to “force their material into moulds which conveniently suggest musical borrowings” simply because it was fashionable and clever to do so, so hazy are the boundaries between the use of the musicalization of fiction as an innovative and legitimate literary device to that of a mere gimmick. One of the most overdone “borrowings” from music, for instance, was that of the Wagnerian “leitmotiv”, of which Virginia Woolf herself was quite sarcastic. In an essay on the novels of Viola Meynell, she will write that

Miss Viola Meynell is not likely to upset anyone by the obvious novelty of her methods. She does not plunge you beneath the surface into a layer of consciousness largely represented by little black dots. She does not experiment with phrases that recur like the motive in a Wagner opera. She has no animosity against adjectives, nor does she exterminate verbs upon principle. (‘Second Marriage’, E2: 238)

Whereas it may be reasonable to argue that information about “what the author intended” should not override what the text may tell us, it seems however that such material cannot be deemed totally “irrelevant” as such as it may certainly supplement the works in question, if only to highlight in a critical and dialectical methodology of investigation, the process through which authors conceive their work and to bring to light any potential discrepancies between authorial intentions (which are, in themselves, of great interest) and the actual textual achievements. The understanding of Woolf’s actual process of “musicalization” to which the diaries in particular attest,

77 ibid.
78 ibid. See also Arthur Elson, ‘Literary Errors about Music’, in The Musical Quarterly, April 1917, Vol. 3, No. 2., pp. 272-281, for an article listing some of the most famous musical claims and “errors” in (mainly 19th century) literature.
will therefore form a significant and essential stage of our investigation as we endeavour to formulate Woolf’s particular modalities of music and literary relations.

Strangely enough Virginia Woolf prefigures some of the more recent literary criticism theories we just touched upon, in an ongoing reflection on how to judge literary works. The musical model, in this regard, plays a central defining role. Indeed, one of the functions of the musical paradigm in Virginia Woolf’s understanding of prose is precisely to give her the model of an impersonal form of expression. We may thus take our cue from her as she tells us in her essay ‘How should one read a book?’ that “reading is not merely sympathising and understanding; it is also criticising and judging” (‘How should one read a book’, E4: 396). Promoting an art of reading which is focused on the text as perceived by the reader rather than by the writer, she will suggest that “to read a book well, one should read it as if one were writing it” (E4: 390), which does not however give us the licence to impose our own design upon the work. Whilst at the same time cautioning against “reading between the lines or by making a voyage of discovery into the psychology of the writer” (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4: 1), she will ask of the reader to “bend [his] imagination powerfully” (‘How should one read a book’, E4: 393) in order to identify with the writer’s project, “to understand, to appreciate, to interpret, to sympathise” (E4: 396) with his “literary experiment”, from within the text itself, in order to try and perceive beyond the “dust, [...] distractions and interruptions” of the actual “friction of reading and the emotion of reading”, the novel’s own “design”, in which the author’s vision of “heaven and earth and human nature” is expressed with “uncompromising idiosyncrasy” (E4: 393), and just as “the state of reading consists in the complete elimination of the ego” (L5: 319), so does the state of writing. In consequence, not only does Woolf think the author’s thoughts are potentially irrelevant to understanding the text in question, but her conception of the work itself puts into practise this view. Such a project she had had whilst writing The Waves: “I wanted to eliminate [...] my self” (L4: 381), and speaking to Ruth Fry of the reception of her biography of Roger Fry, the review “she liked best” was “J.T. Sheppards in the Cambridge Review, for that said that Roger Fry was there and not V.W., which was what I meant” (L6: 479). We must indeed bear in mind that she did her utmost to shun what she will herself call aesthetic or artistic “preaching”, in particular in her works of fiction, any writing which will try to “argue a case” (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4:1) rather than have an aesthetic purpose, in particular when dealing with prose-
writing. "I am afraid of the didactic", she will write in her diary in January 1933 (D4: 145). That the artist's role is to create works of "art" would seem to go without saying, but in times of political and social upheaval, he is often asked to "come down from your ivory tower, leave your studio" and be useful to society ('The Artist and Politics', TM, 182). This goes for writers above all: "celebrate fascism; celebrate communism. Preach what we bid you preach. On no other terms shall you exist" (TM, 182). But for Virginia Woolf, art should not be "useful" or else it is not art: why should the agitations of politics be the novelist's concern when the painter may remain detached? "He is not concerned with the feelings of his model but with its form. The rose and the apple have no political views. Why should he not spend his time contemplating them, as he has always done, in the cold north light that still falls through his studio window?" (TM, 180). Above all, the musician is considered "the most dangerous of the whole tribe of artists" (E1: 29),

for if the stringing together of words which nevertheless may convey some useful information to the mind, or the laying on of colours which may represent some tangible object, are employments which can be but tolerated at best, how are we to regard the man who spends his time in making tunes? Is not his occupation the least respectable - the least useful and necessary - of the three? It is certain that you can carry away nothing that can be of service to you in your day's work from listening to music. (‘Street Music’, E1: 29)

Precisely because the material of his art cannot "argue a case", as such, it becomes, for Virginia Woolf, the model for the ideal impersonal (and apolitical) art:

It would be impossible, when we [...] listen to the music of Mozart or Bach, to say what was the political condition of the age or the country in which these works were created. And if it were otherwise [...] if Bacchus and Ariadne symbolized the conquest of Abyssinia; if Figaro expounded the doctrines of Hitler, we should feel cheated and imposed upon, as if, instead of bread made with flour, we were given bread made with plaster. (TM, 181)

The major problem with writing, as opposed to music, is that the artistic merit of prose is often demeaned or overlooked for the simple reason that it uses the same prosaic practical language of every-day communication, prose having "taken all the
dirty work on to her own shoulders; has answered letters, paid bills, written articles, made speeches, served the needs of businessmen, shopkeepers, lawyers, soldiers, peasants” (‘The Narrow Bridge of Art’, CE2: 223), whereas music, be it the “inferior” music of the “vagrant musician” or the “Italian organ grinder”, is just as much music as that of the “Queen’s Hall orchestra” (E1: 27), the only difference lying in the degree of virtuosity and technical prowess: “the gift of conception is certainly superior to the gift of expression, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the men and women who scrape for the harmonies that never come while the traffic goes thundering by have as great a possession, though fated never to impart it, as the masters whose facile eloquence enchants thousands to listen” (E1: 28). Virginia Woolf will argue that the writer of prose, “even if he writes as an artist, without a practical end in view, still he treats prose as a humble beast of burden which must accommodate all sorts of odds and ends; as an impure substance in which dust and twigs and flies find lodgement” (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4: 1). Woolf continues by asserting that

more often than not the prose-writer has a practical aim in view, a theory to argue, or a cause to plead, and with it adopts the moralist’s view that the remote, the difficult, and the complex are to be abjured. His duty is to the present and the living. He is proud to call himself a journalist. He must use the simplest words and express himself as clearly as possible in order to reach the greatest number in the plainest way. Therefore he cannot complain of the critics if his writing, like the irritation in the oyster, serves only to breed other art; nor be surprised if his pages, once they have delivered their message, are thrown on the rubbish heap like other objects that have served their turn. (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4: 1)

Surprisingly the musical model plays a central role in Virginia Woolf’s conception of the aesthetic nature of works of art. An example of this particular aspect of Woolf’s understanding of the musical model presents itself in her analysis of two authors, D.H. Lawrence and De Quincey, both representing Woolf’s contrasting views on the artistic value of prose. Reviewing De Quincey’s Autobiographic Sketches, a work in which he expresses his life experiences, what makes De Quincey’s autobiographic writing so interesting and valuable for Woolf is the fact that despite a style and subject which one would consider to be implicitly “personal”, we are not
made to think of him as a self-conscious author, nor are we made to think about his political ideas, but we are simply made aware of something everlasting and beautiful, a vision of the world which Woolf considers to be intrinsically "musical":

When we bring his work to mind we recall it by some passage of stillness and completeness, like the following:

'Life is Finished!' was the secret misgiving of my heart; for the heart of infancy is as apprehensive as that of maturest wisdom in relation to any capital wound inflicted on the happiness. 'Life is Finished! Finished it is!' was the hidden meaning that, half-unconsciously to myself, lurked within my sighs; and, as bells heard from a distance on a summer evening seem charged at times with an articulate form of words, some monitory message, that rolls round unceasingly, even so for me some noiseless and subterraneous voice seemed to chant continually a secret word, made audible only to my own heart - that 'now is the blossoming of life withered for ever.'

Such passages occur naturally, for they consist of visions and dreams, not of actions or of dramatic scenes, in his autobiography sketches. And yet, we are not made to think of him, De Quincey, as we read. If we try to analyse our sensations we shall find that we are worked upon as if by music. ('De Quincey's Autobiography', CEA: 1-2)79

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf will be highly critical of D.H. Lawrence for his argumentative type of writing, as she finds that the author's own voice, thoughts and opinions pervade his novels. Reading Aldous Huxley's 1932 edition of Lawrence's letters,80 Woolf will remark in her diary,

To me Lawrence is airless, confined: I don't want this, I go on saying. And the repetition of one idea. I don't want that either. I don't want 'a philosophy' in the least: I don't believe in other people's reading of riddles. What I enjoy (in the Letters) is the sudden visualization: the great ghost springing over the wave (of the spray in Cornwall) but I get no satisfaction from his explanations of what he sees. [...] It is the preaching which reaps me. Like a person delivering judgment when only half the facts are there; & clinging to the rails & beating the cushion. Come out and see what's up here - I want to say. I mean it's so barren: so easy: giving advice on a system. The moral is, if you want to help, never systemise - not till you're 70: and have been supple and sympathetic

79 Woolf is quoting here an extract from the first chapter of De Quincey's Autobiography Sketches.
and creative and tried out all your nerves and scopes. He died though at 45. And why
does Aldous say he was an ‘artist’? Art is being rid of all preaching: things in
themselves: the sentence in itself beautiful: multitudinous seas; daffodils that come
before the swallow dares: whereas Lawrence would only say what proved something. I
haven't read him of course. But in the Letters he can't listen beyond the point; must give
advice; get you into the system too. (Z)4:126)

In 1932, Woolf had only read the Letters, but eventually, she will be led to read his
novels as well. In her sarcastic article, “Notes on D.H. Lawrence”, which Leonard
Woolf included in the posthumously published collection of fragments, essays and
sketches, The Moment and Other Essays, Virginia Woolf will say yet again of
Lawrence’s style, that “everything has a use, a meaning, is not an end in itself.” He is
not interested in literature “as literature” but as a means to express his own personal
opinions: “the fact that he, like Paul, was a miner’s son, and that he disliked his
conditions, gave him a different approach to writing from those who have a settled
station and enjoy circumstances which allow them to forget what those circumstances
are.” Struggling with the social circumstances of his “birth”, “the middle class,
Lawrence feels, possesses ideas; or something else that he wishes himself to have,”
and these ideas and feelings are what transpires in his writing far from any
considerations as to its aesthetic aim: “The thought plumps directly into his mind; up
spurt the sentences as round, as hard, as direct as water thrown out in all directions by
the impact of a stone. One feels that not a single word has been chosen for its beauty,
or for its effect upon the architecture of the sentence” (‘Notes on D. H. Lawrence’,
MOE, 82).

As a consequence, the musical model also plays a central role in defining
Woolf’s stance concerning the author’s voice and the problem of impersonality.
Speaking about the author’s voice, Hermione Lee will show that Woolf “never refers
to herself in her essays as a novelist, or to her life as Virginia Woolf, or to her
personal relations with anyone she is writing about. She speaks from the ground of the
literary, the historical and the cultural, not the personal. [...] There has to be a veil, or
there is no essay, no conversation, no art, just feeling and opinion and personality”81
and she goes on to quote Woolf’s plea to the prospective writer, “never to be yourself

81 Hermione Lee, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Essays’ in Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (eds). The Cambridge
and yet always". What goes here for her essays also goes for her works of fiction – the reader should appreciate the novel in its own right for its imaginative qualities and artistic merits, not for any personal political or idealistic propositions. Reflecting upon the style of *Mrs Dalloway* - “how the whole ought to have been written” – she questions in particular the inclusion of what she called the “mad chapters”, because they seemed to her to be too expressive of her own personal experiences of "madness", leading her to wonder “whether the book would have been better without them" (*D2*: 322). Woolf will write in her diary that when writing, “if one lets the mind run loose, it becomes egotistic: personal, which I detest; like Robert Graves” (*D2*: 321). In *A Room of One's Own*, she will take as example the fact that we know so little about Shakespeare but so much about his works:

The mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare's mind, I conjectured, looking at the book which lay open at *Antony and Cleopatra*. There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed.

For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's state of mind. The reason perhaps why we know so little of Shakespeare - compared with Donne or Ben Jonson or Milton - is that his grudges and spites and antipathies are hidden from us. We are not held up by some 'revelation' which reminds us of the writer. All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance was fired out of him and consumed. Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded. If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare. If ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded, I thought, turning again to the bookcase, it was Shakespeare's mind. (*ROO*, 73-74)

Virginia Woolf will thus celebrate the voice of the anonymous artist whom she perceived primarily as a musician:

Anonymity was a great possession. It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. It gave us the ballads; it gave us the songs. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer: and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not

---

responsible. He was not self conscious. He is not self conscious. He can borrow. He can repeat. He can say what every one feels. No one tries to stamp his own name, to discover his own experience, in his work. (A, 397)

Taking such a view into account is crucial if we want to understand Woolf's position towards art, music and the musicalization of fiction.

One of the consequences of Virginia Woolf's thoughts on anonymity is that her fiction is never a pretext for an elaborate conversation about art and aesthetics, and this has important consequences on the interdisciplinarity of her style. In her essays and diaries, the references to music are relatively scant, as Virginia Woolf will avoid bantering with such an “easy” metaphor as that of music, on the contrary, using it sparingly and to the point. This also goes for the presence of intermedial clues within the novels themselves. Virginia Woolf undeniably inserted “clues” within her texts. In the margin of her second manuscript draft of The Waves, she wrote that she needed something which “hints at some unity; some profound & everlasting order, at some complex construction. composition” (The Waves, Draft II, p. 441) – and significantly she brings into play at that moment the musical image of the “beaten gong”:

‘The time approaches when these soliloquies shall be shared. We shall not always give out a sound like a beaten gong as one sensation strikes and then another. Children, our lives have been gongs striking; clamour and boasting; cries of despair; blows on the nape of the neck in gardens. ‘Now grass and trees, the travelling air blowing empty spaces in the blue which they then recover, shaking the leaves which then replace themselves, and our ring here, sitting, with our arms binding our knees, hint at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly.’ (W, 28)

The mention of real composers and their music in Virginia Woolf's novels is noticeably small and disseminated and does not lead to any lengthy philosophical or aesthetic arguments within the texts. For critics used to Proust's discussions of the aesthetic merits of Wagner's opera's, of Beethoven's style or of Debussy's impressionism, as well as other musical styles and (real or imaginary) composers,

or, in German modernist literature, Mann's *Dr Faustus* for instance, which features Adrian Leverkühn's philosophical reflections on the role of music in society (the "harmony" of music as a "moral" model, etc.), Woolf's case is particularly disconcerting, if not misleading. Particularly apparent in *Jacob's Room*, any aesthetic, artistic or philosophical inquiry into the nature and role of art is constantly avoided, thwarted by a narrator who breaks off from giving us the full conversations and delights in simply giving us "scrap[s] of conversation" (*JR*, 126), witness the following passage in which openings are made towards a potential discussion of Wagner, but the conversations are implied and never fully disclosed to us by the narrator as he endeavours to give us an impression of Jacob as he speaks about music, rather than transcribe what he is talking about:

Lying back in his chair, taking his pipe from his lips, and saying to Bonamy: 'About this opera now' (for they had done with indecency). 'This fellow Wagner... distinction was one of the words to use naturally, though from looking at him, one would have found it difficult to say which seat in the opera house was his, stalls, gallery, or dress circle. A writer? He lacked self-consciousness. A painter? There was something in the shape of his hands (he was descended on his mother's side from a family of the greatest antiquity and deepest obscurity) which indicated taste. Then his mouth - but surely, of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst. One word is sufficient. But if one cannot find it? (*JR*, 69)

We humorously learn that he has "taste" from the shape of his hands and his mouth, but we do not learn anything about his or Bonamy's views on Wagner. Similar interruptions occur a few pages later, in a conversation about Beethoven:

('I'm twenty-two. It's nearly the end of October. Life is thoroughly pleasant, although unfortunately there are a great number of fools about. One must apply oneself to something or other - God knows what. Everything is really very jolly - except getting up in the morning and wearing a tail coat.

'I say, Bonamy, what about Beethoven?'

('Bonamy is an amazing fellow. He knows practically everything - not more about English literature than I do - but then he's read all those Frenchmen. ')

---

84 See Thomas Mann, *Dr Faustus*, Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1975, p. 66.
'I rather suspect you're talking rot, Bonamy. In spite of what you say, poor old Tennyson...'

('The truth is one ought to have been taught French. Now I suppose, old Barfoot is talking to my mother. That's an odd affair to be sure. But I can't see Bonamy down there. Damn London!) for the market carts were lumbering down the street.

'What about a walk on Saturday?'

('What's happening on Saturday?') (JR, 71)

We never hear what Bonamy has to say about Beethoven, and from one phrase to the next, the narrator has "jumped" to a similarly aborted conversation about Tennyson. For a scholar searching for melopoetic clues in Woolf's texts, such avoidance of musical references is frustrating.

For Virginia Woolf, the "craft" of writing itself must remain imperceptible and therefore too many overt references to a "musicalization of fiction" are to be avoided as they would only serve to bring attention to the technique rather than to the imaginative side of the work. As she writes in her essay on 'Craftsmanship' in 1937, words have many meanings, and it is to the author's credit to play with as many of these meanings as possible, and his work will grow and blossom in the richest of linguistic soils. But for Virginia Woolf, these meanings are not to be dissected or spelt out. On the contrary, they must remain implicit or else we become "specialists, word mongers, phrase finders": "in reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken" (CE2: 248). New words in particular, which cause us to stop and wonder, only serve to "deafen us to the writer's meaning" because "it is them we see, them we hear" and not their meaning. Words like people to "think and to feel before they use them, but to think and to feel not about them, but about something different. They are highly sensitive, easily made self-conscious" (CE2: 250). Wouldn't an explicit musicalized novel thus become particularly "self-conscious" of its own musical style? Drawing attention to the musical devices within the novel would hardly lead the reader to think about "something different" (CE2: 250), that "strange serene confidence that it inspires in us" ('Reading', CE2: 32-33), but instead will lead us to judge the technique in which the novel was written, the virtuosity with which the novelist handled his subject and in the process we shall lose sight of what the book was about in the first place. As Woolf will write, "there is always a demon in us who whispers, 'I hate, I love', and we cannot silence him" ('How should one read a Book',
What has thus so far been misunderstood is that this particular stance – the concealed or covert aspect of her “musicalization” – is directly linked to her conception of the musicalization of fiction as a means of achieving both an impersonal and an expressive style of writing which draws the reader towards her vision, to make us “think” and “feel”, but also to make us “pause” and become “unconscious” – unconscious of the craft which has brought the artist’s vision before our minds (CE2: 251), the craft which has “tempt[ed] words to come together in one of those swift marriages which are perfect images and create everlasting beauty” (CE2: 251). In the writings of Virginia Woolf, a recognisable, explicit “musicalization” is therefore not *sine qua non* for a “musicalization” *tout court*. As a result, Virginia Woolf will rarely bring into play a musical metaphor in her novels and when she does seemingly insert intermedial clues within her texts, critics often pounce upon them and take them at face value. To this we shall return elsewhere, but to give a brief but significant example, the six characters in *The Waves* are nearly always put into a musical perspective by many critics of the novel, from Forster who will thus comment on the insubstantial nature of Virginia Woolf’s characters, “what wraiths, apart from their context, are the wind-sextet from *The Waves*”, to Denise Ginfray, who writes of “le chœur à six voix de *The Waves*” (the six voice choir of *The Waves*). Elicia Clements will very briefly refer to the analogy of the “symphony” as will Alex Aronson, despite the fact that this particular musical image is only mentioned once by Bernard in the closing soliloquy:

[Virginia Woolf] desires nothing better than to “compose” her characters until the imprecision of their human qualities is transformed into the exact polyphonic patterns of a symphony. Again in *The Waves* Virginia Woolf lets a character (Bernard) deliberate upon this form of musical revelation claiming for music a wider imaginative scope than descriptive prose can provide.

---

85 Virginia Woolf will write in a letter to Quentin Bell how she finds that she is “subject to visions” (*LA*: 239).
The passage in question occurs right at the end of the novel as Bernard endeavours to sum up his life and that of his six friends (W, 182). It is precisely the contextualization of Bernard's remark, the fact that Bernard, a would-be writer, is constantly questioning the act of writing and creation, and the fact that the six characters speak in alternate monologues throughout the novel, which will be seen to give this particular one-off reference to music its large-scale *intermedial* relevancy, which does not however mean than any of the critics have questioned the melopoetic relevance of the model of the “symphony” in itself or taken it any further, as we shall do ourselves in Chapters 4 and 5 below. Indeed, Alex Aronson will rather disappointingly say that in *The Waves*, “music, actual or imaginary, rounds up a novel the rhythmic quality of which very nearly approaches the patterns of a musical composition, the ebb and tide of the sea, the coming and going of the waves.”89 Werner Wolf would however argue that unless there is a certain amount of “self-referentiality” within the text – which could, for instance, manifest itself through an internal questioning of either the fabric of the text itself or of the act of writing in general in relation to music or a potential musicalization of fiction, as is the case in *The Waves* but also most of Woolf's other novels90 -, these references may simply be or remain punctual, external, background elements of the narrative, whose importance and relevance would largely be diminished if not completely extinguished in an “intermedial” frame of investigation, as they would remain unrelated to the way the author conceived the work. But not all references to music are tokens of a musicalization of fiction, and the absence of any melopoetic “clues” does not exclude a covert musicalization of fiction. Because Virginia Woolf constantly and painstakingly avoided giving an explicit commentary of a narrator, as Michael Whitworth will say, “the very absence of overt commentary

89 *ibid*, p. 31.
90 Inserting a writer as protagonist, such as Bernard in *The Waves*, is a much used device employed by the modernist writer as it allows the author to bring into play within the novel itself certain facets of the modernist literary debate. See Huxley, 'From Philip Quarles's Notebook', *Point Counter Point*, op.cit., pp. 408-410 – in the same scene which saw the discourse on “the musicalization of fiction”, we witness here a *mise en abyme* as the “novelist-protagonist” reflects on the advantage of “putting a novelist into the novel”:

Put a novelist into the novel. He justifies aesthetic generalizations, which may be interesting - at least to me. He also justifies experiment. Specimens of his work may illustrate other possible or impossible ways of telling a story. And if you have him telling parts of the same story as you are, you can make a variation on the theme. But why draw the line at one novelist inside your novel? Why not a second inside his? And a third inside the novel of the second? And so on to infinity, like those advertisements of Quaker Oats where there's a quaker holding a box of oats, on which is a picture of another quaker holding another box of oats, on which etc., etc. At about the tenth remove you might have a novelist telling your story in algebraic symbols or in terms of variations in blood-pressure, pulse, secretion of ductless glands and reaction times. (p. 409)
means that readers can easily miss, or radically misinterpret" certain aspects of her novels.91 We would therefore question Werner Wolf's argument in his essay on 'Musicalized Fiction and Intermediality' that intermediality should be explicit and recognizable above all:

the most important aspect is the fact that in decoding intermedial 'imitation' or 'showing', the presence of which is a conditio sine qua non of 'musicalized' fiction, the recipient must needs be given some help; otherwise intermediality runs the risk of remaining unrecognized. And it is here that one of the above-mentioned categories emerges as a necessary prerequisite: the mode of 'telling'. In fact, if the reader of a work of fiction is not told, e.g., in the title or by foregrounded allusions to music in the main text, that certain devices are meant to be 'musical' rather than, let us say, experiments with a 'lyricization' of fiction, he or she will in all probability miss the point. This is all the more probable as it is the very nature of covert intermediality not to depart, on the surface, from the accustomed medial nature of the dominant medium.92

We cannot fail to agree with Wolf's views when considering, for instance, the case of the Sirens' passage in Joyce's *Ulysees*. As Melvin Friedman points out, "the fugal arrangement of the Sirens story is a convenient point de repère for one's impressions on the musical associations of Bloom's mind. Without it the reader would become hopelessly lost in the maze of distorted language"93 but the problem with Werner Wolf's understanding of an always explicit intermediality is that it does not take into account the fact that in the case of Virginia Woolf's particular covert musicalization of fiction, as we shall see below, this is a more complex problem which necessitates serious consideration. It is indeed arguable that not only does Woolf avoid a show of technical virtuosity, but her understanding of literature and prose is modelled on a conception of music which is itself, for her, the paradigm of a "transparent" medium.

To take an example, in her short story, ‘The String Quartet’, Virginia Woolf deliberately cut out a paragraph about music and the musical experience which was to be omitted from the final version. This paragraph read as follows in the draft manuscript:

I draw on my gloves with a sense of drawing on my body. There’s very little to be said after a slow movement by Mozart. Together we’ve been under; together when the last ripple laps to smoothness, wake up, remember, and greet each other. – But I don’t know. It’s simpler than that; more entire; more intense. Oh much more intense! Aren’t all the nerves still thrilling as if the bow had played on them? Isn’t one half out of body and mind, beckoned still to release, dance free, caught when the music stops, far from home? But there’s only one movement more, so for Heaven’s sake look at everything, faces, furniture, pictures on the wall, look through the chink in the curtain and see the branch in the lamp light. Collect every fragment in this lovely and exciting universe. Listen; communicate. (SF, 301)

This was replaced by the following paragraphs:

‘No, no. I notice nothing. That’s the worst of music – these silly dreams. The second violin was late, you say?’

‘There’s old Mrs Munro, feeling her way out – blinder each year, poor woman – on this slippery floor.’

Eyeless old age, grey-headed Sphinx.... There she stands on the pavement, beckoning, so sternly, to the red omnibus.

How lovely! How well they play! How – how – how!”

The tongue is but a clapper. Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashed green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting. (SQ, 140)

By avoiding in the second version any explicit reference to Mozart, by obscuring the fact that the narrator had just heard a slow second movement and by obscuring a very intellectual cold-blooded analysis of the nature of the narrator’s musical experience, Virginia Woolf moves away from a discursive conscious explicit commentary towards a more direct evocation of the effect of the music on the narrator, thus shunning any obvious personal or subjective “preaching”. As she will say in ‘A
Sketch of the Past', Virginia Woolf will rather give us an illustration of what she means than tell us about it "once removed": "instead of analysing this, here is an instance of what I mean" (MB, 37).

It is thus hardly that simple to clearly separate objective threads from subjective threads in the analysis of literature, and that is where lies the problem of the pertinence of authorial intentionality. It does however seem problematical, if not detrimental, to wish to eradicate completely the subjectivity of the author by positing the objectiveness of the text and seemingly justifying on the other hand an implicit subjectivity of the critic by favouring an open-ended, hermeneutic view of the literary text itself. In an article on "Literature and its Relation to Other Fine Arts", Giovannini will convincingly argue that the artistic design finally overrides the intention and that it is precisely the design and artistic licence which makes a work of art art:

It may of course be said that meaning also determines the design; but the design once adopted, it imposes the obligation to carry it through, so that there is always the possibility of a modification of the meaning originally intended (whatever that was) to the demands of structural consistency.94

In the end, we are left facing the design and not the intention, even though one may quibble that it is simply exchanging one word ("design") for another ("intention") and that the design cannot help but reflect the intention and vice-versa. Not quite. Though both Beardsley and Wimsatt use both terms interchangeably,95 there is a considerable difference in meaning. The design could be said to be what is left in the finished work of the original intention, or, as Roger Fry has put it, the design would be a scheme or pattern which we may perceive in the work of art, that is, a reason for what is there: "anything which depart[s] violently from this would be not merely meaningless, but an outrage to our sense of order and proportion. We have then an immediate recognition of formal design, or a trend in every part towards a single unity or complete thing".96 Giovannini will continue by quoting the particularly convincing words of T.S. Eliot, who, in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism,
wrote that "what is the experience that the poet is so bursting to communicate? By the
time it has settled down into a poem it may be so different from the original
experience as to be hardly recognisable ... and what is there to be communicated was
not in existence before the poem was completed".\footnote{\citep{Eliot:1933, Giovannini, op.cit., p.188-189.} In Woolf's view, authorial
intentionality is irrelevant to the reader in his appreciation of the "design", as she
clearly suggests the possibility of an "unconscious" design as well as a "conscious"
one:

If we remember, as we turn to the bookcase, that each of these books was written by a
pen which, consciously or unconsciously, tried to trace out a design, avoiding this,
accepting that, adventuring the other, if we try to follow the writer in his experiment
from the first word to the last, without imposing our design upon him, then we shall
have a good chance of getting hold of the right end of the string. ("How should one read
a book", \textit{E4}: 390)

An American student from Harvard, Harmon H. Goldstone, planning to write a book
on Virginia Woolf, asked her in 1932 to read a draft of his "Outline" of her life and
work. Woolf replied that "it is very difficult to give an impartial opinion of a book
devoted to ones own work; but the Outline seems to me to suggest some very
interesting questions; and I should certainly read it with great pleasure if it were about
somebody else", and continued by raising in particular the problem of Goldstone's
references to her literary "intentions" which he had deduced from her essays in a
paragraph which, ironically, she had marked in the margin "\textit{Not for quotation}"

I am a little doubtful as to your reference to 'VW's own statement of the problem of
aspect.' I dont know exactly to what it refers; but I should like to enter a caution against
anything that I have said as a critic being taken as evidence of my own views, or of my
aims. I am much of Hardys opinion that a novel is an impression not an argument. The
book is written without a theory; later, a theory may be made, but I doubt if it has much
bearing on the work. (\textit{L5}: 91)
Not only does Woolf continue by saying that “I do not think however, as you can
guess, that a writer is able to say much about his life or work” (L5: 36) but she
finishes her letter to Goldstone with a final recommendation, “I am sure you will
write better if you are fettered as little as possible by the views of the author” (L5: 91).
Like T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf finds herself that the writer’s vision escapes in his
attempt to write it down in words and that there may be a gap between the intention
and the final design:

The thirty-two chapters of a novel - if we consider how to read a novel first - are an
attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a building: but words are more
impalpable than bricks; reading is a longer and more complicated process than seeing.
Perhaps the quickest way to understand the elements of what a novelist is doing is not
to read, but to write; to make your own experiment with the dangers and difficulties of
words. Recall, then, some event that has left a distinct impression on you - how at the
corner of the street, perhaps, you passed two people talking. A tree shook; an electric
light danced; the tone of the talk was comic, but also tragic; a whole vision, an entire
conception, seemed contained in that moment.

But when you attempt to reconstruct it in words, you will find that it breaks into
a thousand conflicting impressions. Some must be subdued; others emphasised; in the
process you will lose, probably, all grasp upon the emotion itself. (‘How should one
read a book?’, CE2: 2).

The design however is precisely meant to overcome the limitations of the literary
genre and of language itself. It is up to the author to try to minimize this gap between
the vision in his mind and his artistic expression of it, between the intention and the
final work within the process of writing itself. The musical model is at its most
influential in this particular regard as it is seen as a device to bridge this gap. In The
Years, Virginia Woolf will significantly define the underlying design or pattern in
terms of music, though not in a literary context:

She knew exactly what he was going to say. He had said it before, in the restaurant. He
is going to say, She is like a ball on the top of a fishmonger’s fountain. As she thought
it, he said it. Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If
so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? ...
a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure:
that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought. (Y, 398)

In this passage, Eleanor will highlight the fact that the pattern is autonomous, and though created by the artist, it will finally come to exist in itself for itself.

Undeniably, what authors say about their work is always problematical, but if we look at Virginia Woolf’s comments in her diaries and letters (a stream of thoughts which very often includes an ongoing reflection on the literary role of the musical model, all noted down concomitantly to the actual writing of her novels), it is precisely the musicality of the process by which she is shaping the literary expression of her artist’s vision which is revealed. By going beyond “intentionality” as such, a critical study of Woolf’s diaries, letters and autobiographical sketches will serve to bring to light Woolf’s particular understanding of music and the fundamental musicality of her aesthetics in general, from a purely thematic and theoretical point of view, thus contributing to the musicological perspective of this investigation. As Lawrence Kramer would argue, one of the interesting facets of melopoetic studies is precisely to show how certain “cultural values and energies” which were usually associated with and confined to the musical domain[98] are “annexed” in literary works and aesthetics, thus reinterpreting and enriching these values within a broader artistic and aesthetic sphere.[99] The study of the juxtaposition and interaction of these two different modes and means of artistic expression will therefore not only highlight certain stylistic and expressive qualities within literature itself[100] but also, and, most importantly, go beyond what may at first appear to be musically orientated literary criticism in order to shed light on how the occurrence of music in a literary context can reveal how music itself makes sense, thus enlarging and redefining the musicological sphere to include melopoetic studies and contribute to a type of cross-art investigation which Kramer himself wished would play an “enhanced role in the continuing development of musical criticism”.[101] Indeed, very often, the musicological dimension of researching music in literature has often been minimized. 

---

[99] Ibid., p. 167.
or even misunderstood as it appears in the first instance that such research is primarily concerned with explaining the literature rather than music, the music being but a side issue, one of many angles by which to approach the literature. This may be true in some, if not the majority, of musico-literary studies, very often for the simple reason that the scholars studying music in literature – usually themselves from a literary background - often fail to have sufficient knowledge in music (or have a very limited view of certain musicological issues) to balance their views against their (usually apologetically self-confessed\textsuperscript{102}) predominating literary baggage. Thus doing, whilst admirably shedding light on certain aspects of literary style, they fail to address the more fundamental questions of musical meaning and expression and consequently found their research on an often shaky and undefined ground - hence what Steven Paul Scher, one of the leading interdisciplinary scholars of our age, characterizes as the “metaphorical impressionism”\textsuperscript{103} pervading what otherwise could prove to be a fruitful, exciting and legitimate field of inquiry. It is important to make a distinction between those references to music or a musical style of writing, etc. which occur exclusively on a metaphorical level within the various approaches and serve only to enhance the critic's own style of writing by providing generally suggestive and imaginative metaphors and an investigation which questions not only the validity of the metaphors \textit{qua} metaphors in their literary context but also brings to light the purely musical assumptions made by the critic and necessarily implied within each musical metaphor. The problem is not in the use of the metaphors, the problem is the unquestioning use of such metaphors and the fact that certain aspects of musical expression are simply taken for granted, when in reality, these aspects are potentially, musicologically, highly debatable.

It is thus essential to refine and redefine the scope of such terms as “musicality” and “musical” when dealing with Woolf’s writing, bearing in mind that when one analyses the relation between her writings and music, it is very easy to get drawn into

\textsuperscript{102} leading to such remarks as “Of these general forms the last [literature in music] is most easily accessible to the literary scholar like me who is not also a musicologist. Indeed, since musicalized literature is frequently the product of a ‘mere’ amateur interpretation of music by a literary author (as is the case with Thomas De Quincey, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and others) and remains first and foremost literature, it is this intermedial form that falls most readily into the competence of the literary scholar.” – Werner Wolf, \textit{The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{103} Steven Paul Scher, ‘How meaningful is ‘Musical’ in Literary Criticism?’ (1972), in Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf (eds.). \textit{op.cit.}, p.38.
a relatively simple study of the musicality of her language (looking at reiterations as
an expression of rhythm, for instance\textsuperscript{104}), as opposed to grasping the far wider
reaching implications of the originality of an innovative musical conception of
literature. From those critics who are aware of the musical conception of Woolf's
novels but who end up by glossing over the details, usually oversimplifying the matter
in the process, to those who see Woolf's musicality exclusively from the technical
poetical angle, it certainly appears that Woolf's literary "musicality" is particularly
problematical and difficult to assess and has often been interpreted in the most
impressionistic and simplistic ways. Indeed, scattered about the landscape of
Woolfian criticism are comments which either highlight in Woolf's musicality the
purely thematic, figurative or metaphorical aspects only, linking music with its
potential philosophical, political or social aspects\textsuperscript{105} or simply use music as
convenient metaphor. At a fundamental level, critics fall foul of clearly defining what
exactly is "musical" about Woolf's style even though she herself makes an important
distinction between writing "musically" and thinking of her books as "music", a
distinction which, left unaccounted for, leads to a certain degree of confusion when
dealing with the "musicality" of her writing. Overall, critics seldom seek to define the
purport and significance of the recourse to the musical model and lack an informed in-
depth understanding of the wider-reaching implications of Woolf's musicalization of
fiction.

Interestingly, the origin of the word "musicology" itself refers to a discourse
\textit{(logos} in Ancient Greek) on music\textsuperscript{106} and this particular aspect, as well as being one
of the central preoccupations of any study looking at the possible interactions of
words and music, has also fuelled one of the more recent debates on the value, aims
and methods of musicological analyses. A parallel debate can be found in the realm of
literary critique in the past decades, manifesting itself in the clash between a certain
form of scientific "objectivity" found in some linguistic or semiotic studies of
language and literature, and the "hermeneutic" aspect of the broader, historically,
culturally and contextually-orientated analyses of language and literature. As
Lawrence Kramer pointed out in 1989, the "formalist models of musical criticism and

\textsuperscript{105} see Elica Clements, Melba Cuddy-Keane, Michele Pridmore-Brown, or, for a certain feminist
outlook, Jane Marcus and Gyllian Phillips.
\textsuperscript{106} cf. \textit{OED Online}, articles on 'musicology' and '-logy'.

57
analysis” which were at the forefront of recent musicology have increasingly shown limitations, “not so much as techniques but as ends in themselves”, whereas interdisciplinary studies “are particularly useful because they evolve away from an initial separation of semantics and structure”.\textsuperscript{107} Asking the fundamental question “what is melopoetics good for?” (and Kramer is talking here in particular about the musicalization of fiction), he will answer, surprisingly perhaps for some who may think that a study of musicalized fiction is primarily about literature, that “what it’s good for is understanding music”\textsuperscript{108} because such a “comparative attitude” gives us the provisos for an original, sustained and in-depth reflection on music, not only highlighting the role and function of music within a certain artistic context, but also raising fundamental issues concerning its expressive nature and meaning in general. We can only agree with such a project. Indeed, one of the aims of this investigation is to show that there are potentially other legitimate ways of approaching music which a close scrutiny of our particular subject, music in the works of Virginia Woolf, will bring to light. In such a way, the information we may glean from Woolf’s diaries, essays and letters, can only help us to contextualize within the wider frame of her aesthetic thoughts some of the more problematic features of music.

c. Street music, nursery rhymes and the voice of the gramophone: the voice of ‘Anon’ in \textit{Between the Acts}

Virginia Woolf’s particular attention to the anonymous aspect of musical performance is strongly articulated in the novels themselves which very often feature anonymous music, street music, nursery rhymes or miscellaneous tunes played on the gramophone, as we shall now see in this chapter in more detail. We shall be showing in the following pages how Woolf’s conception of the anonymous nature of the musical idiom becomes the very paradigm for the expression of a sense of community and communication, which in Woolf’s last novel in particular, is on the brink of collapse.

\textsuperscript{107} Lawrence Kramer, ‘Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism’, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{ibid.}, p. 167.
All of Virginia Woolf's novels reverberate to the sound of the many street musicians who perform for the sake of the music rather than for that of fame and recognition. In her essay on 'Street Music', Woolf indeed described how she once followed an old violinist "who, with eyes shut so that he might the better perceive the melodies of his soul, literally played himself from Kensington to Knightsbridge in a trance of musical ecstasy, from which a coin would have been a disagreeable awakening" (E1: 28). The Years, which Woolf, as we have already mentioned, had thought of calling 'Music' (D4: 237), probably contains, of all of her works, the most references to street music and music heard from afar, i.e. music which is both anonymously performed and very often of anonymous origins. On the very first page of this novel we learn that, "in the quieter streets musicians doled out their frail and for the most part melancholy pipe of sound" (Y, 1). Even the strains of a waltz played at a neighbour's dance will blend its tones with the many popular tunes heard in the streets:

All the windows were open. Music sounded. From behind crimson curtains, rendered semi-transparent and sometimes blowing wide came the sound of the eternal waltz—After the ball is over, after the dance is done—like a serpent that swallowed its own tail, since the ring was complete from Hammersmith to Shoreditch. Over and over again it was repeated by trombones outside public houses; errand boys whistled it; bands inside private rooms where people were dancing played it. (Y, 138-139)

Virginia Woolf thus does not discriminate between the elaborate compositions of "famous" composers and the improvised tunes of the street musician whose music blends itself into the very rhythms and sounds of the metropolis. In Mrs Dalloway, Septimus Warren-Smith will thus hear a whole symphony of motor horns, penny whistles and roaring traffic:

Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the
traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house. (*Mrs D*, 76-77)

In these novels, the references to street music are mostly punctual, but in *Between the Acts*, Virginia Woolf’s last novel, the narrative itself could be said to revolve around the popular tunes played on the gramophone, carefully hidden behind some bushes at a village pageant. It is the sounds and music of this machine which is to muster the audience (*BA*, 93-95), announce the intervals (*BA*, 114-115), call them back to their seats for the next act (*BA*, 141) and finally “dismiss” them at the end of the play (*BA*, 230). Miss La Trobe, the stout, elderly and loud-voiced producer, co-ordinates the whole afternoon, an “ambitious” (*BA*, 100) performance with “a little bit of everything. A song; a dance; then a play acted by the villagers themselves” (*BA*, 75) spanning the whole of English history (*BA*, 99). The pieces played on the gramophone in *Between the Acts* are primarily traditional tunes or nursery rhymes whose composers have long been forgotten. In a moment of panic, the boy in charge of the gramophone will even mix up the records, further obscuring the origins of the music:

A hitch occurred here. The records had been mixed. Fox trot, Sweet Lavender, Home Sweet Home, Rule Britannia—sweating profusely, Jimmy, who had charge of the music, threw them aside and fitted the right one—was it Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart or nobody famous, but merely a traditional tune? (*BA*, 220)

The anonymity of the music played at that moment only serves to emphasize its powerful effect on the audience’s minds:

Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind’s immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors
straining asunder: To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from
the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their
fingers; and others uncrossed their legs. (BA, 220-221)

The impersonality of this whole episode is particularly marked. Though described in a
highly metaphorical language (cf. the image of “warring battle-plumed warriors”), the
music is not spoken of in terms of personal emotions and individual responses but as
an impersonal communal experience.

Throughout the novel, the music played by the gramophone will thus be a
fundamental unifying and structuring force which will hold the audience together both
during the play and during the intervals, bridging the gaps and carrying the illusion
across the borders of performance/reality and thus blurring all conventional theatrical
boundaries:

The gramophone was affirming in tones there was no denying, triumphant yet
valedictory: Dispersed are we; who have come together. But, the gramophone asserted,
let us retain whatever made that harmony. (BA, 229)

Never will the director, Miss La Trobe, be more distressed than when she feels her
grasp loosening on the minds and imaginations of the audience as the members of the
audience are distracted, significantly at a moment when music had been forbidden: in
one particular scene, described in Miss La Trobe’s script as “ten mins. of present
time” in which she had wanted to “douche them, with present-time reality”,
something went“wrong with the experiment” (BA, 209) as the audience, faced with
an empty stage, puzzled over what was going on:

The audience fidgeted. Sounds of laughter came from the bushes. But nothing
whatsoever appeared on the stage.
“What’s she keeping us waiting for?” Colonel Mayhew asked irritably. “They don’t
need to dress up if it’s present time.”
Mrs. Mayhew agreed. [...] “There she is, behind the tree,” she whispered, pointing at Miss La Trobe. (BA, 208-
209)
For Miss la Trobe, this is a moment of metaphorical death, as she finds herself on the brink of an abyss when the artistic illusion fails and the shared symbiosis between audience and actors, between reality and imagination, and if we read between the lines, between novelist and reader, is shattered:

Audiences were the devil. O to write a play without an audience – the play. But here she was fronting her audience. Every second they were slipping the noose. Her little game had gone wrong. If only she’d a backcloth to hang between the trees – to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing. She had forbidden music. Grating her fingers in the bark, she damned the audience. Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails. (BA, 210-211)

Never more than at this moment is the power of music to hold the audience in thrall during the performance at its most apparent it becomes itself the “backcloth” by which Miss La Trobe could have shut out the facts and superficial distractions of reality. It will however not be music as such which will save Miss La Trobe’s performance at that point, but what Woolf posits as nature’s equivalent to man’s music: a rain shower.

And then the shower fell, sudden, profuse.

No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black, swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears, Tears. Tears.

“O that our human pain could here have ending!” Isa murmured. Looking up she received two great blots of rain full in her face. They trickled down her cheeks as if they were her own tears. But they were all people’s tears, weeping for all people. Hands were raised. Here and there a parasol opened. The rain was sudden and universal. Then it stopped. From the grass rose a fresh earthy smell.

109 This is brought into sharp focus by the negative connotations given by the magnetic presence of the non-musical chuffing and ticking of the faulty gramophone:

They were all caught and caged; prisoners; watching a spectacle. Nothing happened. The tick of the machine was maddening.

“On, little donkey” Isa murmured, “crossing the desert... bearing your burden...”

She felt Dodge’s eye upon her as her lips moved. Always some cold eye crawled over the surface like a winter blue-bottle! She flicked him off.

“What a time they take!” she exclaimed irritably.

“Another interval,” Dodge read out, looking at the programme.

“And after that, what?” asked Lucy.

“Present time. Ourselves,” he read. (BA, 205-206)
"That's done it," sighed Miss La Trobe, wiping away the drops on her cheeks. Nature once more had taken her part. The risk she had run acting in the open air was justified. She brandished her script. Music began—A.B.C.—A.B.C. The tune was as simple as could be. But now that the shower had fallen, it was the other voice speaking, the voice that was no one's voice. And the voice that wept for human pain unending said:

The King is in his counting house,
Counting out his money,
The Queen is in her parlour . . . (BA, 210-211)

Virginia Woolf thus thematizes the paradigmatical value of the impersonal nature of the musical idiom which attains thereby a quasi-universal status, i.e. a "voice that was no one's voice", in the same way as the rain became the voice of a "universal" pain, and, as she argued in her essay on 'Street Music', "though this is not a human voice, it is yet a voice which some part of us can, if we let it, understand" (E1: 31).

That anonymous music is perceived as an agent to foster a communal spirit which embraces humanity and nature will be one of Woolf's major themes in what was probably the sketch of her last ever literary project. On the 22nd of November 1940, having just finished Between the Acts, Virginia Woolf set out to write yet another novel which was to remain unfinished at her death in March 1941.110 The only trace of the first chapter, a short draft provisionally entitled 'Anon', appears though to be less of a novel than a history of the art of writing, written in a style closer to that of an essay rather than a work of fiction, in which Woolf outlines the relations throughout the ages between the writer, artistic expression, and the various influences dictated to him by his circumstances and the expectations of his audience. It seems that music was to be one of the major themes of her projected book as Virginia Woolf traces the origins of the voice of "Anon", the anonymous ancestor(s) of today's novelist to music, or as Woolf noted, to the "song making instinct" (NRR, 373). The draft of 'Anon' corresponds in style and essence to her project of writing a "Common History Book" in the same format as her "Common Reader" series:111

110 "Having this moment finished The Pageant – or Poyntz Hall? – (begun perhaps April 1938) my thoughts turn, well up, to write the first chapter of the next book (nameless). Anon, it will be called." (DS: 340)
I conceived, or remoulded, an idea for a Common History Book – to read from one end of lit. including biog; & range at will, consecutively. (D5: 318, 12 September 1940).

As Brenda Silver has noted, this book was actually probably conceived as far back as 1938, Virginia Woolf noting then in her diary how she was revising her “T.L.S” notes “to consider them as material for some kind of critical book: quotations? comments? ranging all through English lit: as I’ve read it & noted it during the past 20 years” (D5: 180), describing it in February 1939, as a “grand tour of literature. That is I’m going to write a book of discovery, reading as one pulls a string out” (D5: 205). As well as ‘Anon’, Virginia Woolf was writing another essay, provisionally entitled ‘The Reader’, which probably was to be part of the same book.112 A third draft has been transcribed by Silver, called ‘Notes for Reading at Random’. This fragmented text is possibly a collection Woolf’s preparatory notes rather than a draft chapter. Though particularly fragmented, Woolf outlines in her sketch of ‘Anon’, ‘Notes on Reading at Random’ and ‘The Reader’, how true artistic expression lies in an anonymous approach to literature: an anonymous artist, like the wandering violinist Woolf followed in London, has no concerns for recognition, does not need to impress his audience or be at the service of his patron. Today’s novelist, because his works are published, printed, and sold to the public (thus becoming a commercial proposition), is “no longer a wandering voice, but the voice of a man practising an art, asking for recognition, and bitterly conscious of his relations [to] the world, of the worlds scorn.” (A, 391). The work of Anon, because it is not written down, does not belong to one individual and as such, cannot be objectified. It is alive because it belongs to the whole community which keeps it alive:

The singer had his audience, but the audience was so little interested in his name that he never thought to give it. The audience was itself the singer, “Terly, terlow” they sang; and “By, by lullay” filling in the pauses, helping out with a chorus. Every body shared in the emotion of Anons song, and supplied the story. [...] [Anon] was a simple singer, lifting a song or a story from other peoples lips, and letting the audience join in the chorus. (A, 382)

In *Between the Acts*, the audience certainly “joins in the chorus” as it participates in the performance by humming along to the tunes, these anonymous tunes which pass from age to age, tunes heard “out of doors” (*A*, 382), sung by the flower men, the ironmongers or the bootboys, tunes sung at the “back door” (*A*, 386). The tunes picked out on a piano during the intervals will invite the audience to “take part” in the general proceedings and forget their individual troubles:

From the garden—the window was open—came the sound of someone practising scales. A.B.C. A.B.C. A.B.C. Then the separate letters formed one word “Dog.” Then a phrase. It was a simple tune, another voice speaking.

“Hark hark, the dogs do bark
The beggars are coming to town . . .”

Then it languished and lengthened, and became a waltz. As they listened and looked—out into the garden—the trees tossing and the birds swirling seemed called out of their private lives, out of their separate avocations, and made to take part.

The lamp of love burns high, over the dark cedar groves,

The lamp of love shines clear, clear as a star in the sky . . .

Old Bartholomew tapped his fingers on his knee in time to the tune. (*BA*, 139-140)

The voice of Anon’s music thus touches the very essence of the community because his music is what makes the community. This is particularly apparent in the numerous references to popular tunes in *Between the Acts* which will further emphasize the sense of belonging, of a common past shared by all the members of the audience:

In obedience to Miss La Trobe’s command, another tune had been put on the gramophone. Number Ten. London street cries it was called. “A Pot Pourri.”

“Lavender, sweet lavender, who’ll buy my sweet lavender” the tune trilled and tinkled [...]  

“Sweet lavender . . . sweet lavender. . . .” Humming the tune old Mrs. Lynn Jones (of the Mount) pushed a chair forward. [...]  

“I remember . . .” she nodded in time to the tune, “You remember too—how they used to cry it down the streets.” They remembered— the curtains blowing, and the men crying: “All a blowing, all a growing,” as they came with geraniums, sweet william, in pots, down the street. [...]
The tune changed. "Any old iron, any old iron to sell?" "D'you remember? That was what the men shouted in the fog. Seven Dials they came from. Men with red handkerchiefs. [...] "What's that? 'Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road.' I remember the bootboy whistled it. [...] (BA, 184-186)

The many nursery rhymes which feature in the novel will also have the same role. Nursery rhymes are closely related to traditional tunes since they both rely on oral transmission and as such, are very much alive. Because these tunes which pass from generation to generation belong to no one person or even culture, they belong to everybody and thus serve to create channels of understanding, communication and wordless complicity between people - wordless because nursery rhymes are in fact types of nonsense poems which primarily play on sounds and rhythms rather than meanings as such. In such a way, the song sung by Mrs. Swithin in the bedroom as she was showing William Dodge round the house, serves to break the barrier which had somehow come between them:

Could he say "I'm William"? He wished to. Old and frail she had climbed the stairs. She had spoken her thoughts, ignoring, not caring if he thought her, as he had, inconsequent, sentimental, foolish. She had lent him a hand to help him up a steep place. She had guessed his trouble. Sitting on the bed he heard her sing, swinging her little legs, "Come and see my sea weeds, come and see my sea shells, come and see my dicky bird hop upon its perch"—an old child's nursery rhyme to help a child. Standing by the cupboard in the corner he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass. (BA, 87)

---

114 very often different words are sung to the same tunes, even across countries (the tune for 'Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman' is thus also used in England, for 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star', 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep', in Germany for 'Morgen Kommt der Weinachtman', as well as Hungarian and Dutch carols), or similar rhymes are found in different languages (cf. Iona and Peter Opie, 'Germanic Equivalents' in The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, op.cit., p. 9-15).
115 ibid., p. 2.
116 A similar scene occurs in To the Lighthouse:

Her husband spoke. He was repeating something, and she knew it was poetry from the rhythm and the ring of exultation, and melancholy in his voice:

Come out and climb the garden path, Luriana Lurilee.
The China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the yellow bee.
The words (she was looking at the window) sounded as if they were floating like flowers on water out there, cut off from them all, as if no one had said them, but they had come into existence of themselves.
And all the lives we ever lived and all the lives to be
Are full of trees and changing leaves.
These intimations of a possible sense of community and harmony between members of the audience, between the audience and the performers, but also between humans and nature, are made all the more poignant by the underlying threat of the impending war which will soon shatter this very community. As he admires the beautiful unspoilt view of the downs from the terrace of the house, Giles will reflect how only a few miles over the horizon, “Europe [was] bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the Folly. He, too, loved the view.” (BA, 66-67) Soon, even nature would be destroyed by man’s foolishness. Amidst this sombre atmosphere of doom, music and art become the only escape, the means, perhaps, to overcome the greed and selfishness of men, as if the music of ‘Anon’ hadn’t been completely silenced by the printing press and fragments of the ancient harmony could still be perceived in the simple tunes and the nursery rhymes which pervade Between the Acts. As Woolf was to say in her essay on ‘Street Music’, music, because of the very impersonality of its expression,

is the only thing made by men that can never be mean or ugly. If therefore, instead of libraries, philanthropists would bestow free music upon the poor, so that at each street corner the melodies of Beethoven and Brahms and Mozart could be heard, it is probable that all crime and quarrelling would soon be unknown, and the work of the hand and the thoughts of the mind would flow melodiously in obedience to the laws of music. It would then be a crime to account street musicians or any one who interprets the voice of the god as other than a holy man, and our lives would pass from dawn to sunset to the sound of music. (E1: 31-32)

She did not know what they meant, but, like music, the words seemed to be spoken by her own voice, outside her self, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things. She knew, without looking round, that every one at the table was listening to the voice saying:

I wonder if it seems to you, Luriana, Lurilee
with the same sort of relief and pleasure that she had, as if this were, at last, the natural thing to say, this were their own voice speaking.

But the voice had stopped. She looked round. She made herself get up. Augustus Carmichael had risen and, holding his table napkin so that it looked like a long white robe he stood chanting:

To see the Kings go riding by
Over lawn and daisy lea
With their palm leaves and cedar
Luriana, Lurilee,
and as she passed him, he turned slightly towards her repeating the last words:

Luriana, Lurilee
and bowed to her as if he did her homage. Without knowing why, she felt that he liked her better than he ever had done before; and with a feeling of relief and gratitude she returned his bow and passed through the door which he held open for her. (TTL, 171-172)
Thus, music is not only a model for an impersonal and anonymous style of writing which escapes political engagement. The musical paradigm should also, for Woolf, be paradoxically understood in terms of social force which bridges the gap between people and creates channels of wordless communication which transcend individuality and isolation in order to create a sense of community.
A close and critical reading of Virginia Woolf’s short story, ‘The String Quartet’, provides us with a wealth of information concerning Woolf’s thoughts not only on the potentialities but also, most importantly, on the shortcomings of different approaches to the musicalization of fiction. Even so, Werner Wolf has rightly pointed out in his own short study of this text that the intermedial qualities of this short story have as yet “rarely been appreciated” though not, it seems, without reason. Chapters two and three form an ensemble in which we shall be offering a close reading of ‘The String Quartet’ as it provides us with some key features of Woolf’s idiosyncratic perception of music, highlighting in particular the complex nature of her

1 One of four woodcuts designed by Vanessa Bell for the first edition of Monday or Tuesday, Richmond: The Hogarth Press, 1921, online: http://library.vicu.utoronto.ca/exhibitions/bloomsbury/vbell.htm
2 See Appendix 2 for the complete transcript of the text of ‘The String Quartet’
understanding of the musical experience as a paradigm for the musicalization of her own fiction. Our analysis will take into account many past and current melopoetic theories as well as bringing up some central musicological questions in an investigation marked by a constant interchange between readings of the short story in itself, incursions into Woolf’s melopoetic views and aesthetics, and a contextualization within the broader interdisciplinary landscape in question as the aesthetic, musical and literary issues brought up in ‘The String Quartet’ exceed the scope of the story in itself and often prefigure the larger-scale melopoetic ventures of Woolf’s later novels. This will eventually lead us to consider the novels more fully in Chapters four and five.

a. ‘The String Quartet’: a fictionalization of music?

(i) Preliminary observations

The experimental nature of Monday or Tuesday as a whole, which Woolf herself acknowledged as being a milestone in her own stylistic development (cf. ‘Modern Fiction’, 1925, E4: 160), as well as its recognised originality within the broader Modernist literary context and the fact that the fifth story, ‘The String Quartet’, is one of Woolf’s rare works of fiction whose content is primarily and explicitly focused on music and the musical experience, do indeed give rise to certain fundamental questions concerning the underlying musical conception of her style. ‘The String Quartet’ was written in 1921 towards the beginning of Virginia Woolf’s literary career and published in the collection Monday or Tuesday. A selection of eight short stories which Woolf had been writing from 1917 to 1921, Monday or Tuesday is considered to be one of her first truly Modernist literary experiments, not so much an experiment with the genre of the short story itself but rather with her novel approach to certain new literary techniques and subjects. The ambivalent format and the clearly delineated focus of the short story have been seen to play a crucial role in Woolf’s literary development and artistic aesthetics in general as these sketches prefigure the highly original stylistic and formal qualities of her later novels without
putting her under the particular constraints brought about by working on a full-length novel. Woolf herself will say of her short stories:

These little pieces in Monday or (and) Tuesday were written by way of diversion; they were the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style. [...] That [...] showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it – not that I have ever reached that end; but anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I discovered that method of approach in Jacobs Room, Mrs Dalloway etc – how I trembled with excitement. (L4: 231)

Exasperated by the incomprehension and puzzlement of some of the critics of Monday or Tuesday, she will complain that “they don’t see that I’m after something interesting” (D2: 106, 8th April 1921). Despite this ambivalent critical reception of the collection as a whole, ‘The String Quartet’ in particular was seen to stand out from the other stories and was greatly admired by the poet T.S. Eliot as well as the biographer, author and critic Lytton Strachey, leading Virginia Woolf to report in her diary that “Eliot astounded me by praising Monday & Tuesday! This really delighted me. He picked out the String Quartet, especially the end of it. ‘Very good’ he said, & meant it, I think. [...] It pleases me to think I could discuss my writing openly with him” (D2: 125, 7 June 1921). Concerning Lytton Strachey’s words of appraisal, she writes: “L[eonard] met me at tea & dropped into my ear the astonishing news that Lytton thinks the String Quartet ‘marvellous’. This came through Ralph, who doesn’t exaggerate, to whom Lytton need not lie; & did for a moment flood every nerve with pleasure, so much so that I forgot to buy my coffee & walked over Hungerford Bridge twanging & vibrating” (D2: 109). Virginia Woolf will also be delighted that her friend, the art critic Roger Fry, who had organized the first two Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London, thought that Monday or Tuesday showed she was “on the track of real discoveries, & certainly not a fake” (D2: 109).

On first reading, ‘The String Quartet’, despite its musical title and backdrop, would hardly appear to be about music in any direct or significant way, but on the contrary, appears to be quite a straightforward example of a miniature in what was

---

4 this comment refers specifically to a review of Monday or Tuesday in The Times written by Harold Child. We shall return to his review in more detail below. See also Virginia Woolf, the Critical Heritage, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, op.cit., ‘Introduction’, p. 13-15 and the selection of reviews of Monday or Tuesday, pp. 87-93.
then the new fashionable Modernist stream of consciousness technique which Virginia Woolf was perfecting at that time, an expression of the flow of thoughts, perceptions and experiences of a particular character, in this case, a first-person narrator, in a given situation, the public performance of a string quartet. Through the expression of the narrator's point of view, a complex, fragmented perception of the surrounding world, Woolf seems to be exploring different states of consciousness, from the pre-concert "orts, scraps and fragments" \((BA, 220)\) of the half-heard greetings and ensuing conversations which give rise to speculative thoughts and associations in the narrator's mind, to the narrator's highly individual experience of the musical performance \(\textit{per se}\). As the narrator herself speaks of the "silly dreams" she imagines for each of the movements of the quartet, I shall refer to these as the "dream-sequences".

From a purely literary perspective, despite the fact that there are several leading threads which run through the imagery of the successive dream-sequences - not to use the musically misleading term "leitmotiv", which has now, through repeated misuse, become a highly controversial and rather meaningless cliché \(-, each dream could be read as a tableau or a short self-contained story, from the exciting description of a rush of fish in the tumultuous currents of a river, to the nostalgic and emotional moonlit river trip, followed by the unfolding of a dramatic quasi-Shakespearian love story complete with a duel between the villain and the hero as the heroine flees for her life and finally, the alluring, awesome and yet mysterious vision of a great warfaring city, which however proves itself to be a mirage. Intangible, it shimmers away, leaving us contemplating the bare loneliness and desolation of an inhospitable desert landscape as the last notes of the performance die away. Throughout the whole performance, a whole day and night has passed in the imagination of the narrator, the end of the quartet symbolizing the new dawn.

As the narrator will exclaim at the start of the second movement, "'Hush!' The melancholy river bears us on", the flowing waters of the river become an analogy for

---

5 As we are not told explicitly the gender of the narrator, we shall, for convenience's sake, consider the gender as feminine, but we shall return to this point below. See also, Werner Wolf, \textit{The Musicalization of Fiction – A study in the Theory and History of Intermediality}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.148-149

6 as Calvin S. Brown notes that "leitmotiv, which can be usefully applied to a repeated verbal formula used for associative purposes, is increasingly used as a fancy term for any recurrent (or sometimes merely important) idea, theme, image, or pattern – in fact, for almost any literary element of any kind whatsoever", ‘Musico-literary Research in the Last Two Decades’, \textit{Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature} 19:6 (1970), quoted in Peter Jacobs, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 236-237
the flow of the music itself, pacing the narrator’s dreams. In this way, whilst at the same time composing the narrator’s thoughts and figuratively flowing through and thus thematically connecting each of the dream-sequences, ‘The String Quartet’s’ river will itself undergo amazing metamorphoses.

In order to clarify our subsequent analysis of the dream-sequences, we could break down the various moments which compose the narrator’s response to the music as follows: after springing out in fountains and jets from under a flowering, burgeoning pear tree, the stream cascades down from the top of the mountain into the deep and swift bubbling currents of the river Rhone, then, eddying into fish-laden pools, flows under the stone arches of ancient cities past laughing fishwives. This we shall call the first dream-sequence. After the first interval, in the second dream-sequence, the narrator imagines she is on a boat, slowly floating along a slow “melancholy” river which runs through osier beds in the darkness, the moon shining through the willow branches, before capsizing, the souls of the drowned passengers rising as wraiths into the sky. After the next interval, what is now a gentle stream meandering through the grounds of a Southern European, possibly Spanish medieval castle, has become mere background, the narrator turning away from it to focus

---

7 This is reminiscent of the “ceaseless music” of the river Derwent which “composed” Wordsworth’s thoughts and “flowed” along his own dreams, slipping in Book II of ‘The Prelude’ to become a metaphor for the “mind”:


Swift Rhone! thou went the ‘wings’ on which we cut
A winding passage with majestic ease
Between thy lofty rocks.

8 see Appendix 2 for a complete transcript and structural breakdown of ‘The String Quartet’.

9 Apart from the highly specific mention of the river Rhone, no other clues point to a French setting to the dream. In such a way, the Spanish associations serve to further fragment the narrative continuity
rather on the action of the scene between the two lovers and the Prince. This we term the third dream-sequence. At last, after the “escape” of the lovers, rather than flowing to the sea, the river strangely turns back on itself. The narrator, thus feeling the end of the performance approaching, seems to look back upon her dreams, retracing her steps through the imagery back to the fish of the opening dream-sequence, in a short transition towards what we call the fourth and final dream-sequence, the waters of the river gathering into a “moonlit pool” which then “dissolves” into the “opal sky” of the new dawn, the iridescent rainbow-like colours and the oval shape associated with “opals” itself suggesting an aerial reflection of the surface of the pool. This then gives way to the last scene, the mirage of an impressive and stately citadel and the final dry, hot, barren and significantly waterless desert scene. In this story, the music thus appears to be merely taken as a springboard for the expression of the random and fanciful images conjured up by the narrator as she listens to it, even though the music between the dream-sequences. The link to Spain, later on in the text, is indeed suggested by the mention of lemon trees, indigenous to Spain in particular, as well as the “King of Spain’s gift”, the rapier, a traditional Spanish sword. Another possible reference to Spain occurs in the next passage – the “white arches firmly planted on marble pillars” reminiscent of Arabic or Moorish architecture, cf. the architecture of the Alhambra in particular. The references to the Middle Ages abound: from the “seneschals”, name given to officers, stewards and major-domo in medieval households (defined in 1913 edition of Webster’s Dictionary as: “an officer in the houses of princes and dignitaries, in the Middle Ages, who had the superintendence of feasts and domestic ceremonies; a steward. Sometimes the seneschal had the dispensing of justice, and was given high military commands” (online http://machaut.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/WEBSTER.sh?WORD=seneschal), the “clarion”, which is a medieval trumpet (see R. Dahlqvist and E. Tarr, ‘Clarion’, Grove Music Online, op.cit.). Lace petticoats, on the hand, are more typical of the 16th and 17th Centuries (see Online Etymology Dictionary).


Even as a river,- partly (it might seem)  
Yielding to old remembrances, and swayed  
In part by fear to shape a way direct,  
That would engulp him soon in the ravenous sea--  
Turns, and will measure back his course, far back,  
Seeking the very regions which he crossed  
In his first outset; so have we, my Friend!  
Turned and returned with intricate delay.  
Or as a traveller, who has gained the brow  
Of some aerial Down, while there he halts  
For breathing-time, is tempted to review  
The region left behind him; and, if aught  
Deserving notice have escaped regard,  
Or been regarded with too careless eye,  
Strives, from that height, with one and yet one more  
Last look, to make the best amends he may:  
So have we lingered. Now we start afresh  
With courage, and new hope risen on our toil.


12 cf. the verb “drooping”
is certainly the motivating force behind the dreams of the narrator, as we shall see below.

Given the highly imaginative nature of the dream-sequences, it is not surprising that in one of the first reviews in the *New Statesman* of *Monday or Tuesday*, written by one of the Bloomsbury members, Desmond MacCarthy (writing under the pseudonym “Affable Hawk”), and published only two days after the collection came off the press, ‘The String Quartet’ will be perceived as “[a wonderful description] of such fancies as are woven like a cocoon round the mind while listening to music”, reminding us of a similar passage in *The Voyage Out* when the narrator describes Rachel’s musical talent:

> If this one definite gift was surrounded by dreams and ideas of the most extravagant and foolish description, no one was any the wiser. (*VO*, 30)

In ‘The String Quartet’, we are however given a full account of the extravagant and foolish dreams of the narrator to the point that the story would thus appear to be neither about music proper – it seems to be more concerned with the expression of the narrator’s stream of consciousness – nor is it musical as such because its discursive style does not depart from traditional narrative syntax and structures and is intrinsically literary. We are told nothing of the music itself in technical musical terms, we are told very little about the actual playing and we have hardly any indication of what is being performed, as we only know indirectly, from a remark made by a fellow member of the audience, that an “early” Mozart string quartet is possibly on the programme. Only through the scraps of conversation heard during the intervals between the actual playing are we actually given (very scant) factual information as to the nature of the performance. In fact, only one directly “musical” event occurs throughout the dream-sequences, i.e. the mention of the word “scale”:

> The gentleman replies so fast to the lady, and she runs up the scale with such a witty exchange of compliment now culminating in a sob of passion. (*SQ*, 141)

---

Two other references to music are made, but these are more ambivalent as they are part of the dream-narratives proper and consist of a metaphorical description of the music, first, when the narrator imagines hearing horns, trumpets and clarions as part of her dream-narrative (SQ, 141) even though the music is performed by a string quartet, and secondly, the mention of a “march” (“march of myriads”, SQ, 141) in the last scene. Whereas in the former case, it is indeed possible to hear distinctive traditional hunting horn figurations in music which is not written for horns, the reference to a “march” on the other hand is seen by Werner Wolf to be a direct reference to a musical “march”, but it would seem more likely that it is being used primarily in its imaginative and non-musical sense, possibly reflecting the “martial” character of the final movement heard by the narrator but not necessarily meaning that the last movement is a “march” in itself. We shall return to the implications of these passages in more detail below.

It is undeniable that in ‘The String Quartet’, the narrator’s rêveries could potentially be read on their own, out of the musical context, purely as dream-narratives. Could Virginia Woolf actually be attempting to render the fascinating and mysterious kaleidoscopic shades of dreams and visions, the way a palette of recurrent images undergoes amazing and irrational metamorphoses in the imagination of the narrator, rather than trying to render a musical experience? Undoubtedly, Virginia Woolf was very much interested in dreams – in 1928, she writes in her diary of the strange emotional intensity of dreams, in particular the way dreams leave a powerful impression in us even though we may not remember the actual “facts” of the dream:

14 there are innumerable examples of this in instrumental music, cf. for instance, the final four bars of Debussy’s piano prelude, ‘Les Sons et les Parfums tournent dans l’air du Soir’, in which feature the indication: “comme une lointaine sonnerie de cors” (“like the sound of distant horns”): (public domain edition of Debussy’s prelude downloaded from www.sheetmusicarchive.net). It is interesting to note that Mozart himself wrote a String Quartet no. 17 in B flat Major, K458 “Hunt” (1784) in which can be heard horn-like calls in the first movement, even though there is no evidence to show that Virginia Woolf had this piece in mind when she wrote ‘The String Quartet’. 
All last night I dreamt of Katherine Mansfield & wonder what dreams are; often evoke so much more emotion, than thinking does – almost as if she came back in person & was outside one, actively making one feel; instead of a figment called up & recollected, as she is, now, if I think of her. Yet some emotion lingers on the day after a dream – even though I’ve now almost forgotten what happened in the dream. [...] Yet somehow I got the feel of her, & of her as if alive again, more than by day. (D3: 187)

Not only does the narrator describe her musically inspired thoughts as “dreams” but the notion of dreaming is suggested within the text as the swan “floats dreaming into mid-stream”. What role would music then have in this short story? T.S. Eliot himself will note Woolf’s indirect approach to the musical performance she is dramatizing in ‘The String Quartet’ in a review of Monday or Tuesday in The Dial of August 1921. In this article, he compares different approaches to Modernist narrative fiction and literary expression, from James Joyce’s more direct rendering of the “external world” to what he perceives as a more reflective and contemplative approach, characteristic of Virginia Woolf’s style of writing. We cannot help feeling that T.S. Eliot had ‘The String Quartet in mind when he wrote of Monday or Tuesday that

the craving for the fantastic, for the strange, is legitimate and perpetual; everyone with a sense of beauty has it. The strongest, like Mr Joyce, make their feeling into an articulate external world; what might crudely be called a more feminine type, when it is also a very sophisticated type, makes its art by feeling and by contemplating the feeling, rather than the object which has excited it or the object into which the feeling might be made. Of this type of writing the recent book of sketches by Mrs Woolf, Monday or Tuesday, is the most extreme example. A good deal of the secret of the charm of Mrs Woolf’s shorter pieces consists in the immense disparity between the object and the train of feeling which it has set in motion. Mrs Woolf gives you the minutest datum, and leads you on to explore, quite consciously, the sequence of images and feelings which float away from it.15

Undeniably the ‘String Quartet’ would appear to be essentially about “the sequence of images and feelings” which float away from the music and so doing, all but obscure

15 As we have mentioned above, page 80, T.S. Eliot had greatly admired ‘The String Quartet’ in particular. See complete text of T.S. Eliot’s 1921 “London Letter” online: http://world.std.com/~raparker/exploring/tseliot/works/london-letters/london-letter-1921-08.html#paragraph-5
the nature of the music being performed, as they show a mind utterly absorbed in its own imaginative experience, a mind "overflow[ing] with images, favourite images of water and wavering fishes"16 (even though the extent to which the images of the fish are the narrator’s "favourite" images remains to be seen). Like T.S. Eliot, Bernard Blackstone argues that “in [...] The String Quartet, [Virginia Woolf] tries to convey the effect of an early Mozart by means of a chain of images”.17 Reading the dreams on their own would however prove quite unsatisfactory as the narrative discontinuity and certain otherwise incomprehensible shifts of perspective only fully make sense within their musical context, something which Werner Wolf also noted,18 the imagery not only suggesting the music but itself being suggested by the music. Needless to say, this approach to the musical experience in terms of dreams and images is highly controversial. As James Hafley has noted,

no musicologist would approve of this story’s narrator, whose voice clearly enough suggests the quartet’s musical structure [...] but responds to that structure in extramusical equivalents of the most shamelessly impressionistic type.19

If the “dream-sequences” are primarily characteristic of stream of consciousness and even structural parallels between the text and the underlying music remains vague and “impressionistic”, as James Hafley has pointed out, this leads us to ask, what relevance does the musical aspect of the story bear upon the significance of the dreams? To understand the logic of the dream-sequences and the choice of images, would it not be necessary however, to read the text as an explicit instance of musicalization of fiction?20 Only then will the meaning and purport of the text become clear. We need to address such questions if only because these are the first

17 *ibid.*
18 see also Werner Wolf: “In spite of inevitable uncertainties, which mainly stem from the natural limits imposed on any musicalization of fiction and consequently on any attempt to consistently and convincingly identify the music beneath the words, ‘The String Quartet’ contains indications of an imitation of music which are persuasive enough to support the impression that this story is a major experiment with verbal music. At any rate, it is only with reference to the concept of a musicalization of fiction that some of the otherwise bewildering aspects of the text can be accounted for”, in “Modernist Musicalization of Fiction II: Woolf, 'The String Quartet'”, in *The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the theory and history of Intermediality*, op.cit., p. 154.
20 see Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction – A study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, op.cit., p.154
objections which are made against potential fictional renderings of music and would, if left untouched, undermine our whole project. In fact, Bernard Blackstone's description of 'The String Quartet' raises complex but probably quite unintentional implications. What he obviously meant was that in 'The String Quartet', Virginia Woolf was trying to give a verbal account of the effect of the music, that is, she is describing the music by means of this "chain of images". Werner Wolf will describe Woolf's musicalization of fiction in the dream-sequences as "the creation of imaginary content analogies", a "typical example of verbal music".21 "Verbal music" it may well be as Steven Paul Scher defines "verbal music" as "any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions: any poetic texture which has a piece of music as its 'theme'" and which Scher differentiates from the "poetic imitation of musical sound", the onomatopoeia of "word music".22 The images should thus be taken as metaphors of the music and this would mean that the narrator's dreams are an explicit musicalization of fiction, and should be read accordingly. So far, so good. But in such a way, to appreciate Woolf's story, the reader would then have to decode the "chain of images" back into the imaginative performance of a Mozart string quartet. As a mental exercise, this might prove entertaining to a point, but as a significant and profound aesthetic experience, this does seem a bit far-fetched. One might as well simply go and listen to an early Mozart quartet to enjoy the effect of the music first hand. The problem with Blackstone's reasoning is that it takes the "chain of images" for granted and thus fails to take into account the possibility that the effect of the Mozart string quartet which Virginia Woolf is trying to express in her story is in fact quite the opposite and we shall be arguing that Woolf is in fact questioning the relevance of this mental "chain of images" in a musical context.

(ii) Words about music: Virginia Woolf and musical criticism

Concerning the relation between music and words, Virginia Woolf had clearly stated in 1909 in a review of Wagner's operas published in The Times that

---

21 ibid. p. 151.
when the moment of suspense is over, and the bows actually move across the strings, our definitions are relinquished [sic], and words disappear in our minds. ('Impressions at Bayreuth' E1: 291-292)

Contrast this view with her dramatization of the first few notes of the musical performance in her short story, ‘The String Quartet’:

Here they come; four black figures, carrying instruments, and seat themselves facing the white squares under the downpour of light; rest the tips of their bows on the music stand; with a simultaneous movement lift them; lightly poise them, and, looking across at the player opposite, the first violin counts one, two, three – Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches, and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy [...]. (SQ, 139)

In this story, words are certainly made to render the music. In fact, the random, fanciful, irrational, and “unmusical” nature of the narrator’s dreams would even seem to be typical of a “hysterical” type of response to music which Woolf was so critical of, to the point of terming it “worthless” and “unpleasant”. Indeed, in 1915, Virginia Woolf had thought that

all descriptions of music are quite worthless, & rather unpleasant; they are apt to be hysterical, & to say things that people will be ashamed of having said afterwards. (D1: 33)

It would be quite far-fetched however to put down such a striking discrepancy between her understanding of the wordlessness of the musical experience and her far from wordless description of it to any sort of inconsistency in Virginia Woolf’s writing and aesthetics. It certainly leads us to ask: what was Virginia Woolf trying to do when she wrote ‘The String Quartet’ when it so flagrantly contradicts her own thoughts on musical expression and on the literary expression of music? That the narrator herself will be ashamed of her “silly dreams” points however to the fact that Virginia Woolf was quite aware of what she was doing in this short story.
In fact, Virginia Woolf was no novice in musical criticism and appreciation and was highly conscious of the difficulties of talking about music. She started publishing articles on music, the opera and musical criticism and scholarship as early as 1905. These articles give us an insight into her perceptive awareness of the problems inherent to musical criticism and the relation between musical expression and language in particular. Writing to Emma Vaughan in 1905, with her usual sense of humour, Woolf will nevertheless show considerable enthusiasm for her first article on music:

my National Review article is about Music so you can imagine what a flutter is going through the musical world – it has probably reached Dresden. My remarks will revolutionize the whole future of music. (L1:180)

Whilst we shall return to this particular article in greater detail below, it is the one she wrote in 1909 in Bayreuth on Wagner ('Impressions at Bayreuth', E1:288-293) which is of most interest at this point. In what proves to be one of her longer articles of that period, she will argue that neither a serious comprehensive aesthetics of music nor any precise rules of musical criticism have ever been produced, as the principles of this art have yet to be “laid bare” in a sort of modern-day Aristotelian poetics of music. Describing Aristotle’s Poetics as a “really excellent bit of literary criticism! — laying down so simply & surely the rudiments both of literature & of criticism. [...] singularly interesting & not at all abstruse, & yet going to the root of the matter as one feels” (PA: 241-242), it is not surprising that for Virginia Woolf, far from confusing the two, music criticism and aesthetics of music go hand in hand:

this lack of tradition and of current standards is of course the freest and happiest state that a critic can wish for: it offers some one the chance of doing now for music what Aristotle did 2000 years ago for poetry. (‘Impressions at Bayreuth’, E1: 288)

Talking about the “unfamiliarity” (E1: 288) and the “mysterious” (L1: 404) nature of modern compositions in particular, Woolf will ask, “who in music has tried to do what Strauss is doing, or Debussy” (E1: 288) and by which objective standards can one judge them when the principles of musical expression in general have never been fully investigated (E1: 288)? Because of this, the scope of music is “much less clearly
defined than the scope of the other arts” and “we are little restrained in our interpretation”. Despite the fact that this situation is “the freest and happiest state that a critic can wish for” (E1: 288), she is acutely aware how, very often, musical criticism is undermined by “vague formulas, comparisons, and adjectives”, as exemplify for her “the descriptive notes in a concert programme” which all but “hopelessly” lead one “astray” in our appreciation of music (E1: 289). Woolf will ask, how far can any musical criticism “be held to be any reflection upon the music” (E1: 288)? How, in that case, is it possible to judge which of our impressions and interpretations of the music are “relevant” and which “impertinent”, and Woolf will conclude by saying that “it is here that the amateur is apt to incur the contempt of the professional”, as the amateur can only give his immediate and often untechnical “impressions” (E1: 291). “Amateurs” thus

have a secret belief that they understand as well as other people, although they seldom venture an opinion; and, at any rather, there is no doubt that they love music. If they hesitate to criticise, it is perhaps that they have not sufficient technical knowledge to fasten upon details. (E1: 288-289)

In some cases however, some such “amateurs” reach an age and standing in which they “develop a strange jealousy, a pontifical attitude of mind, so that a celebrated surgeon thinks nothing of dictating laws to a painter, and a successful barrister defines the province of realism in music” (Old and Young’, E2: 62). On the other hand, even the “professional” approach itself, that of the critic “versed in the science [of music]”, who would no doubt have heard “very different and very emphatic examples” of musical genres and “made up his mind as to the nature of the operatic form” (Woolf is here talking specifically about listening to Wagner’s operas), cannot escape the “ambiguous state of musical criticism” as each new work has qualities and objectives so unique as to be incomparable to previous works (E1:288). Indeed, for Virginia Woolf, music is foremost what is heard, it is an art which itself “is so much alive”, because it relies on live performances which render the comparison between works and styles even more difficult. Unlike literature, where one can simply pick up a book off a shelf and compare it, page by page, to another, there is a further difficulty in musical criticism of the first decades of the twentieth century at least, certainly at the time when Virginia Woolf was writing her review of Wagner and her story, ‘The
String Quartet’, in the fact that the music critic can only rely on live musical performances to form an opinion as to the music, performances which in themselves vary greatly depending on the context, the interpretation, the mind-set of the listener, etc.\(^{23}\) Only by hearing a piece several times can one start to detach oneself from the immediacy of the musical experience and perceive the work as a whole, as a work of art, and thenceforth give an opinion as to its nature:

before we have made up our minds as to the nature of the operatic form we have to value very different and very emphatic examples of it. [...] *Parsifal*, in particular, lays such a weight upon the mind that it is not until one has heard it many times over that one can begin, as it were, to move it to and fro. (*E1*: 289)

Virginia Woolf will thus highlight the originality of Wagner’s style, and the difficulty in understanding his music on a first hearing and she will herself listen to *Parsifal* twice during her visit to Bayreuth (*L1*: 404-405):

the unfamiliarity of the ideas hinders one at the outset from bringing the different parts together. One feels vaguely for a crisis that never comes, for, accustomed as one is to find the explanation of a drama in the love of man and woman, or in battle, one is bewildered by a music that continues with the utmost calm and intensity independently of them. (*E1*: 289)

In such a way, Virginia Woolf will be profoundly dissatisfied by the manifest “indecision” of even the most “professional” critics in judging new works, and the shallow criticism of “a single hour, in a particular day” which, taking the music itself for granted, only concentrates “upon the prima donna’s cold”, an ironical observation which reappears in *Jacob’s Room* during a performance of Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*: “Mr Wortley, shifting his position behind the Italian Ambassador’s wife, thought that Brangaena was a trifle hoarse” (*JR*, 91).

\(^{23}\) Writing to her sister, Vanessa Bell, from Bayreuth, Virginia Woolf will indeed report:
We heard Parsifal yesterday – a very mysterious emotional work, unlike any of the others I thought. [...] Saxon and Adrian say that it was not a good performance, and that I shant know anything about it until I have heard it 4 times. (*L1*: 404)

In a similar way, in 1905, talking about hearing Strauss’s *Domestic Symphony* for the first time, Virginia Woolf will note in her diary,
Late in the day I discovered a Symphony Concert at the Queens Hall, as my ear craved music I went & had to take a 5s. seat; & listened to a stiff, but on the whole interesting, programme. A long Domestic Symphony by R. Strauss, partly beautiful, partly unintelligible – at least to me on a first hearing. (*PA*: 242)
From an author so conscious of the shortcomings of musical appreciation and aesthetics and “the difficulty of changing a musical impression into a literary one” (E1: 291), it is highly surprising that she herself would then unconsciously set out to write a short story revolving so explicitly round music which at first view is so full of those “vague formulas, comparisons, and adjectives” which undermine musical appreciation, without some ulterior motive for doing so (witness those “descriptive notes in a concert programme” which she finds only serve to “lead us astray” (E1: 291)). The musicalization of fiction which Woolf is attempting in ‘The String Quartet’ is not therefore to be taken as being gratuitous. On the contrary, a closer reading of this short story will reveal that it is far from being an understanding of the musical experience as being foremost the art of imaginative free association and emotive sentimentalism, which would go against Woolf’s own lifelong consistent views on music and the musical experience. Virginia Woolf, as we shall endeavour to show below, is exploring here with great lucidity and insight the entire spectrum of the ways music makes meaning. By failing to perceive Woolf’s inherent satirical vein and detachment in the story, Harold Child and Desmond MacCarthy have not entirely misunderstood the story – ‘The String Quartet’ is indeed also about this “cocoon” of fantasies and the way each image gives way to another within a “stream of consciousness” flow, it is also an exercise de style in interior monologue - but it is foremost about the way music makes meaning. For an author so preoccupied with “words” and meanings which form the raw material of her own literary art, music, in particular the Mozart string quartet which features in her short story, being a truly “wordless” art, provides the perfect foil from which to explore artistic expression and communication.

(iii) Programme music? From Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet to a Mozart string quartet

24 Speaking of hearing Wagner’s Parsifal, she will indeed show herself to be well aware of the difference between impressions derived from the music in itself and those which spring from cultural or extra-musical associations: “how much of the singular atmosphere which surrounds the opera in one’s mind springs from other sources than the music itself it would be hard to say. It is the only work which has no incongruous associations” (E1: 290).
By making absolute music represent, Virginia Woolf is hardly seen to be trespassing over any literary boundaries. On the contrary, she is clearly caught trespassing over the boundaries of musical expression, hence the musicological objections made by most critics of ‘The String Quartet’. What bothers them is not so much the irrational dream-sequences in themselves, but the fact that Virginia Woolf is treating Mozart as programme music. Even the narrator is ashamed of her “silly dreams” when the rest of the audience is listening to the technique of the violinists or gauging the stylistic value of an “early” composition. But no reader of this story would have been surprised or shocked if, for example, Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet had been on the programme. Little do they know that the Schubert is in fact the real piece behind the story, the piece which obviously provided Virginia Woolf with the idea of the fish and the river narrative.

When Virginia Woolf first thought of writing this short story in March 1920, she went to listen to a performance of “the Schubert quintet” at a concert given in Campden Hill in the vaulted music room of George Booth’s house (whose wife Margaret was a violinist) in order to “take notes for my story” (D2: 24). Woolf thus deliberately set out to record her own impressions and responses to the music during this real performance. The Schubert ‘Trout’ Piano Quintet, D 667 in A major (1819), which she heard among other works performed in Campden, was however transformed in the story into an early Mozart string quartet. Virginia Woolf must have had a very good reason for doing so. The references to “spotted fish” can only have been suggested to Woolf by the title of the Schubert ‘Trout’ Quintet she heard in Campden Hill. Even though the ‘Trout’ Quintet is not directly “programme” music, it

---

25 Virginia Woolf was working on most of the short stories which were to form the collection *Monday or Tuesday* in 1920 and 1921 (cf. a letter from Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 31 Oct. 1920: “I’m getting doubtful whether I shall have time to write the story called Monday or Tuesday – if not, I don’t know what to call the book.” (L2: 445)). She heard the concert in March 1920 and the story was written probably 10 months later in January 1921. *Monday or Tuesday* was published on 7th of April 1921.

26 This was something that she often did, drawing on her experiences to nourish her art, witness these few lines heading her essay ‘Phases of Fiction’: “The following pages attempt to record the impressions made upon the mind by reading a certain number of novels in succession” (‘Phases of Fiction’, CE2: 56).

27 Among the works played that evening in George Booth’s house by the English String Quartet (founded in 1915 by Frank Bridge) was also a Beethoven trio. According to Booth’s diary: “English String Quartet. Beethoven Trio. Schubert Quintet. Crowds.” (D2: 24, ft. 13).

28 It is of course a very remote possibility that Woolf should change the title and formation of the piece she heard for the simple reason that she didn’t want anybody to trace her inspiration back to the actual concert in Campden Hill. Even if this was so, and it is highly improbable, it does not affect our claim that the change was deliberate and significant.
is nevertheless associated with the lied of the same name, Schubert's musical setting of a poem by Christian Friedrich Schubart, since the fourth movement of the quintet is a set of variations based on the melody and accompaniment of Schubert's earlier song "Die Forelle". It is irrelevant to consider here the musical accompaniment to the Schubart poem in Schubert's lied, or even the poem itself, which Virginia Woolf did not necessarily know, as the musical setting of the poem in the lied is hardly relevant within the context of the fourth movement of an otherwise musically "absolute" quintet whose only purely musical link with the lied is that of a musical theme. Schubert indeed often took themes and reworked them into different pieces regardless of their original context, purely for their musical potential. What is apparent in 'The String Quartet', is that the title of the quintet in the real performance which Virginia Woolf heard, most certainly suggested to her the imagery of the narrator's first dream-sequence in the fictional performance of Mozart, especially as the dreams which the narrator is experiencing are not subconscious (at least, not at the beginning), but very much intentional, as we have already shown above.

In such a way, by featuring a Mozart string quartet, absolute music par excellence, instead of the programmatic Schubert, we wish to argue that Virginia Woolf is in fact taking a deliberate stance to work away from any potential programmatic justification of the narrator's dreams. So doing, she is implicitly questioning their relevance and purpose within the framework of a performance of "absolute" music in such a way that a potential musical programme cannot be seen to justify the dreams in any way. The dreams are thus directly inspired by the music itself and not related to any extra-musical programme: they are about the music and not about a non-musical programme. As a consequence, the relations between the dream-sequences and absolute music in general become also far more significant and universal – rather than having the image of a river full of fish given to the narrator by an extra-musical title which could have justified the imagery and perhaps led to a more shallow "interpretation" of the music, the imagery is here linked with music in general and absolute music in particular if we consider that a Mozart string quartet is

30 the poem itself is about a fisherman who catches an unwary trout in a brook, an analogy for the dangers of "angling seducers". For the full text see online: http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=14667
being played, thereby serving to highlight certain specific features of the narrative which the melopoetic parallels between absolute music and literature give rise to. Virginia Woolf is here deliberately making words render music in order to go beyond the more typical surface analogies which are usually seen to exist between these two arts to dramatize what “beliefs the listener has about music”.31

(iv) The problem of the musicalization of the story’s structure

As well as concealing the source of the music, it appears that Virginia Woolf deliberately obscured any explicit or technical references to the quartet’s structure and this has further repercussions on certain facets of Woolf’s “musicalization” of the story: an undefined unnamed string quartet can hardly be considered as a significant underlying structural model because the genre itself in music has been and can be handled by composers in many different ways. Because of the narrator’s highly imaginative response to the music, it is quite obvious that only a very vague and generalized outline of the quartet’s movements, suggested by the breaks in the dream-sequences and the atmosphere of each section, can be deduced from the text, even though both James Hafley and Werner Wolf will not only assume quite unquestioningly that one quartet is being played throughout, but will find fault in Woolf’s handling of this aspect of the musicalization, the structural ambiguity of the story lying in what James Hafley terms as the narrator’s “shamelessly impressionistic” response to the music.32 Even so, the ambiguity is most certainly present in the text. As a consequence, a structural interpretation of Virginia Woolf’s musicalization of fiction in this story, of the type which leading interdisciplinary scholar Steven Paul Scher considers as the only valid melopoetic transmutation,33 would therefore itself be considered as relatively unconvincing as the link between the

32 see above page 78, see also Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 151-152
33 cf. Steven Paul Scher: “only in the case of the third type of response – alluding to structural phenomena, to artistic arrangement in music-like sequence – are we dealing with literary techniques which can be proven on occasion to be more or less analogous to certain techniques in actual music. Thus when we try to demonstrate the semblance of a specifically musical structure or device present in a literary work, the use of the term 'musical' seems to me legitimate.”, in 'How meaningful is 'Musical' in Literary Criticism?' (1972), in Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf (eds.). op.cit., p. 44.
music and the narrative is tenuous and the ambiguities unresolved. Without clear
indication as to what exactly is performed (as opposed to the specific performance of
Beethoven’s 5th Symphony in Forster’s Howards End, for instance and Helen’s
response to precise musical moments34), structural parallels become more difficult to
make and certainly more far-fetched. If the music was supposed to be a structuring
force, obscuring the source as well as the precise delineation of the movements would
seem rather to defeat its own purpose. Nevertheless, many critics have seen fit to
search for underlying structural parallels and have attempted to see in ‘The String
Quartet’ a structural musicalization of fiction, sometimes forcing the text into their
own convenient structural moulds. If we are to consider that the entire performance
enacted in the story is of one quartet only, it is very often taken for granted that there
are only three movements in the fictional Mozart quartet,35 as there are three
noticeable “breaks” in the musical performance, i.e. interruptions in the narrator’s
musically inspired day-dreams when the audience start to talk among themselves. A
fourth movement could however be possible as we shall see in more detail below. It is
furthermore unclear whether several different pieces are not possibly being played, or
even if there are possibly two singers in the final dream-sequence, as the narrator
speaks of “the gentleman” and “the lady” (SQ, 141). The reference to words could
either be to real words sung (indistinctly) by a soprano (cf. “the words are
indistinguishable”, SQ, 141), but this seems highly unlikely since we are supposed to
be listening to a string quartet, or is a remark on the unnecessary presence of words to
convey the meaning of the purely instrumental music, the narrator failing to invent the
words of what she hears as being a “dialogue” between what are in fact two musical
“characters”, rather than the fact that she could not understand the hypothetical
singers’ real words. Indeed, it is quite common and conventional to read human traits
and genders into (purely instrumental) musical phrases and forms, however

34 see footnote 66 on page 99.
35 There would be however no reason to assume, as Werner Wolf does (cf. Werner Wolf, The
Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op. cit., p. 152) that
Virginia Woolf is potentially thinking of a Mozart divertimento (K. 138 in F major, composed in 1772)
for structural reasons as quite a few of Mozart’s “early” string quartets do in fact have three movements
and not four, as Wolf suggests, including his second and fourth string quartets K. 155, K. 157
(composed 1772) and his fifth and sixth, K. 158 and K 159 (1773). For a complete list of Mozart’s
works see ‘Mozart’, § on ‘Works’, Grove Music Online, op. cit.

88
problematic this may be. The mention of horns furthermore confuses the matter. As James Hafley says, “surely this is an odd string quartet: with horns in the last movement. Mozart himself has been thoroughly invented”. The fact that the performance is of one quartet only is substantiated by the fact that in one of Virginia Woolf’s original versions of the short story, the second and third movements (the second and third dream-sequences) are explicitly referred to by the narrator in a paragraph which was then omitted from the final version, thus reading as follows in the draft manuscript: “There’s very little to be said after a slow movement by Mozart. [...] But there’s only one movement more” (SQ, 301). But the fact that Virginia Woolf cut this paragraph out and hence obscured the fact that the second dream-sequence did in fact correspond to the slow movement of the Mozart string quartet makes it possible that the fictional performance was indeed meant to suggest a conglomerate of different pieces. As James Hafley notes, “it is surely not probable that an audience would congregate this way to hear only one quartet before dispersal”. It is noteworthy that the second break appears quite unmistakably to be a proper interval as Mrs Munro, at that point, in a passage which significantly replaces the original manuscript paragraph which referred explicitly to the Mozart slow movement, leaves the concert-room and the narrator actually sees her in the street, “beckoning, so sternly, the red omnibus”, having probably stood up herself and wandered over to the window to look out (the curtains being otherwise closed to keep the concert-room in a suitable penumbra).

Werner Wolf suggests the following outline in three movements, an outline which we agree with up until his delineation of the last movement:

---


37 James Hafley, ‘Virginia Woolf’s Narrators and the Art of “Life Itself”’, in Ralph Freedman, op.cit., p. 31; we have mentioned above the possibility of hearing horn-like figurations which certain musical figures may suggest, see above page 76.


39 cf. the chink in the curtains through which the narrator sees the green leaf on the tree outside (SQ, 140). In that way, the first dream-narrative could correspond either to the hypothetical first movement of Mozart, the second dream-sequence then corresponding to the second and third movements (Werner Wolf describes the “crash!” as “an acoustic imitation of a surprising fortissimo chord”, indicating the start of new musical moment, cf. Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 152), or (rather unconvincingly) the first dream-sequence could suggest a performance of the whole Mozart quartet, followed in the second dream-sequence by a different, more “melancholy” piece altogether.
it is rather obvious, at any rate, that it must be a work in three movements: the commencement of the first movement is clearly indicated by the fact that the lifting of the bows and "the first violin count[ing] one, two, three —" are mentioned, and the beginnings of the ensuing movements are each signalled by an admonitory "Hush", by which some obviously interested listeners want to break the flow of conversation which has started in the short intervals between the movements. [...] The second movement, starting with ‘the melancholy river bears us on’, may be an adagio in a "melancholy" minor key. [...] The third movement opens with ‘These are the lovers on the grass’, and again gives the impression of a rather lively movement. 40

But whereas Werner Wolf is adamant that there are only three movements, himself basing his interpretation of the structure on the character of each dream-sequence and the fact that Mozart quartets more typically have three movements rather than four, we would furthermore split Werner Wolf’s “third” movement into two clear-cut musical moments (if not straightforward musical movements), not as James Hafley will do (splitting the Shakespearian drama into a minuet and trio) but rather suggesting either the start of a fourth movement or a distinctive coda at the point when the imagery and atmosphere of this section abruptly and significantly changes to give way to the desert scene. This is announced by the calls of the horns and the words of the last section suggesting a more martial and march-like style of music, in comparison to the music which inspired the pastiche of the courtly gallantries of the Classical period. Bernard Blackstone sketchily suggests that this last dream-sequence is in fact a minuet followed by a final allegro and we are tempted to agree with his interpretation:

The first movement, we gather, is a brisk allegro; then comes an adagio ('the melancholy river bears us on'); the minuet is translated into terms of eighteenth-century gallantry ('if, madam, you will take my hand-----'); and the final allegro is a salute of silver horns. 41

To which Werner Wolf strongly objects, contending that Blackstone

does not see the irregularity that results from this segmentation: the clear structural marker which is constituted by the interpolation of conversations occurring between the first, second and third movements would be curiously missing between his alleged third and fourth movements, which are not divided by any reference to the outer situation. Consequently, the supposition that a musical composition in four movements is being played in ‘The String Quartet’ is untenable.42

There is however no reason not to admit that this passage comprises two very distinct musical moments which could be two movements played without break, *attacca subito*. We shall return in more detail to the problem of the delineation of this section in our analysis of what we consider is a fourth dream-sequence.43 Of interest is yet another interpretation of the quartet’s structure: Avrom Fleishman’s highly original if rather succinct understanding of the music as the structuring principle behind the whole of the short story rather than just the part focusing on the performance of the fictional quartet, in such a way that “Woolf’s prose follows the phases of experience that make up a chamber music concert so as to resemble the music itself”.44 Speaking of the form of the Woolfian short story, Avrom Fleishman has said of ‘The String Quartet’ in particular that it “has perhaps the most elaborate and independently interesting form among Woolf’s short stories” as it illustrates for him a type of “circular” narrative – “an exercise in *imitative* form” – which was taking over in Modernist literature of the time from the more traditional linear plots. Surprisingly, Fleishman seems to consider however that because it is so explicitly an experiment in the musicalization of fiction, “an exercise in form per se”, it therefore “cannot be considered among the most important tales”.46 ‘The String Quartet’ is therefore, for Fleishman, a contrived formal interdisciplinary transposition at its worst. Fleishman’s analysis of ‘The String Quartet’ takes place within the context of a study of Virginia Woolf’s move towards non-linear or “circular” narrative progressions, which he defines primarily as texts in which a feature of the opening (a word, a sentence, a

43 see Appendix 2 for complete text with our own outline of the different sections.
45 ibid.
46 ibid.
situation) is mentioned again at the close of the story. Thus, he finds that the short story ‘Lappin and Lapinova’ “opens and closes with a definition of the imposing term ‘marriage’”, and he concludes rather perfunctorily that, for this reason, “the form of the story has been neatly rounded off”. To fit his overarching theory to ‘The String Quartet’ story, Fleishman considers Woolf’s structural musicalization to apply to the whole narrative, and he thus includes in his overview the opening “orts, scraps and fragments” of the pre-concert assembly. Thus, putting the form of the story in musical terms, he describes it as A-B-C-B’-A’, giving the following outline:

A = “a sketch of the audience assembling”

B = “a freely imagined description of the Mozart quartet being played”

“a reverie in which the listener imagines a little love story

C = unfolding [...] set in a society like that in which the music was written”

B’ = “abruptly, the imaginative description of the music returns”

A’ = “the audience is described filing out”

This palindromic structure is derived from architecture and is commonly known as an “arch” form. It is usually considered as the most stable as well as the most static of all musical forms as it folds back upon itself, metaphorically suggesting the image of an arch. As such, it is a particularly expressive form as it subverts an otherwise linear progression within a chronological temporal structure, and could, in certain interdisciplinary contexts, be particularly appealing. Because of its symmetrical...

47 ibid., p. 59
48 ibid., p. 67
50 as we shall see in our own analysis of The Waves as sonata-form – which can be loosely considered as an arch-form - in chapter 5.
constraints, it is actually very rarely attempted as such in musical compositions,⁵¹ as
the preference is usually given to sonata-forms which allow for more freedom whilst
still recapitulating the opening bars at the end of the piece. While the dramatization of
the performance itself in 'The String Quartet' does highlight a sort of arch form, as we
have seen, the river turning back upon itself in the final dream-sequence before the
final coda, to what extent is Fleishman justified in also considering the opening and
closing sections as part of a melopoetic experiment in form? For Fleishman, arch­
forms, or "circular" stories, are "those that come back to their origins, re-establish an
equilibrium, or discover the nature of what is already there",⁵² describing them as the
Woolfian "moments of being" which dramatize sudden "flashes of insight" both in a
temporal sense (subverting linear chronology by returning to the opening moments)
and in a "dialectical" sense (the ending re-illuminating, in some way, the opening):
"circular stories can be said to engage themselves entirely in what is initially given".⁵³
Because Fleishman notes that in 'The String Quartet', "the circularity of form may be
said to be concentric, with the day-dream of romance in a past age forming the inner
core, but never developing significant relations with the outer and middle circles",⁵⁴
he concludes that the mirror images A/A', B/B' are too disconnected to give any
coherence to the story as a whole and C has no obvious link to the rest of the
narrative. What is "initially given" is not significantly brought into any new
perspective by the ultimate recapitulation of section A, hence his dismissal of the
story as being "merely an exercise in circular form"⁵⁵ derived from music and not
worthy of further study. It however seems that, first of all, the story's structure is too
ambivalent to be considered as a mere exercise and secondly, the musical outline he
gives of the story as a whole is debatable in itself. The structure of the story would
seem to depart from his outline far too strongly to warrant it being considered as a
true exercise in form. It is true that the opening and the closing sections concern the
audience, first arriving at the concert-hall and then leaving, but so do some passages
within the central concentric circles when the audience discuss the music. The

⁵¹ this form is particularly associated with the music of Bartok, see Gerald Abraham, 'The Bartok of
the Quartets', Music and Letters, Volume XXVI No. 4, October 1945,
⁵² Avrom Fleishman, op. cit. p. 69
⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 68
structure of the story would seem to stem from the story's subject-matter (a concert, at which people arrive, sit, listen, and then depart) rather than from any contrived musicalization of the overall form of the story. Fleishman further contends that the story is "imitating" the form of the music, but isn't the story simply giving an account of the concert as a whole and not only of the music performed? Virginia Woolf was particularly interested in the discrepancy between the music itself and the social implications of the actual event. The dream-sequences could indeed be said to "imitate" the music in some way, as we shall be seeing below, but there is nothing of the musical shape about the concert-going experience as a whole. Furthermore, the only argument which would justify reading the story as an "arch-form" is to consider what he calls the "reverie" as a free-standing section totally disconnected from the other dream-sequences followed by a clearly delineated recapitulation of section B. But this does not happen. The "reverie" is far from being a clear-cut moment in the story, and it certainly merges into the last section of the quartet's performance. There is nothing in the text to show that section B "abruptly" returns, unless Fleishman is thinking of the phrase, "but to return" which marks the start of the flight of the lovers (the start, for James Hafley, of the minuet\textsuperscript{56}) but which we would count as being part of the same reverie as it is in no way the start of a new narrative since it speaks of the same lovers who had just met on the grass outside the banqueting hall – the "little love story unfolding", as he puts it, actually unfolds until the lovers escape and there is a distinct break in the narrative signified by the three dots. What follows at that point can hardly be considered as an abrupt return of the "description of the music". Isn't the love story in any case also a "description of the music", especially as it contains direct musical terms (cf. the lady "runs up the scale", the sound of the "horns", \textit{SQ}, 141)? His outline is hardly convincing and we must strongly put into question the notion that the story as a whole is an experiment in the formal features of a musicalization of fiction. If the reverie cannot be clearly termed a part in itself and if the recapitulation of section B is not a recapitulation but another story altogether (about the city and not about the river), then the whole of his arch-structure crumbles, since there is no part C, and certainly no return of part B, but simply a narrative which follows the performance of several movements in quite a linear and consecutive way.

\textsuperscript{56} James Hafley, 'Virginia Woolf's Narrators and the Art of "Life Itself"', in Ralph Freedman, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 30
Rather than questioning the story’s arch-structure and dismissing ‘The String Quartet’ as “merely an exercise in circular form” which reduces the musical element to being a mere pretext, shouldn’t Fleishman be questioning the outline he is making in the first place? In his study of the entirety of Woolf’s shorter fiction, by trying to account for this particular story in terms of either “linearity” or “circularity”, has not Fleishman fallen into the trap of reading into the story a convenient musical structure which was never there in the first place and which, as he concludes himself, does not tell us anything about the purport and meaning of the story? The story can hardly be considered as an “exercise in form per se” but is rather an investigation of the way music makes meaning and the only structural borrowings from music correspond to the moments of actual playing. Even though there are concentric circles, they cannot be considered as literally as Fleishman would have it. James Hafley will highlight far more convincingly the modalities of these concentric circles by arguing that three quartets are to be “heard” simultaneously in the text: Mozart’s, on which is superimposed “the narrator’s version of Mozart’s”, framed by “the narrator’s version of the other-than-Mozart that is life”,57 i.e. the “99.44 percent subjective”58 voice, the consciousness which has selected (and composed) the ors, scraps and fragments of real life outside the subjective “aesthetic experience”,59 as it is given to us in the balance between the opening and closing passages and the performance per se.

The fact that there are so many possible interpretations of the musical structure underpinning the story is quite suggestive. By obscuring both the programmatic source and the underlying musical structure of the performance, Woolf gives the narrator’s musical experience a certain indetermination or universality, thereby allowing her to delve more deeply into the implications of the musical experience in general and the relation between music, imagination, expression and language. In such a way, “the aesthetic questions raised by this story – of the relationships between ideality and reality, art and life, subjective and objective, personal and societal, expression and imitation, fiction and fact”,60 as James Hafley has put it, become all the more significant.

57 ibid., p. 31
58 ibid., p. 30
59 ibid., p. 30
60 ibid., p. 30
b. Modes of listening

This certainly leads us to ask, to what degree therefore do the modalities of the narrator’s particular type of musical listening give us an insight into Virginia Woolf’s experiment with a type of musicalization of fiction, considering that the dream-sequences appear to be in fact more characteristic of an instance of a fictionalization of music? To go a step further, what can such a story tell us as to the nature of the musical experience, of musical expression and of the relations between music and literature in general other than the fact that it seems that ‘The String Quartet’ epitomizes the idea that Virginia Woolf, through the voice of her narrator, shows what some would consider to be a most naive and simplistic understanding of music and the way music makes sense? It cannot be denied that music as expression of free-associated emotions and imaginings did have its heyday in some types of lyrical nineteenth century musical appreciation, as we shall see below. Would Virginia Woolf simply be unwittingly continuing in what is now considered to be not only a passé but a questionable appreciation of music?61 This hardly seems possible when Virginia Woolf herself, in Night and Day, will associate the images and visions formed in one’s mind when one listens to music with a superficial manner of listening, in particular how “the mind shapes all kinds of forms, solutions, images when listening inattentively to music” (ND, 241, my italics). “It’s difficult not to think of other things” (D1: 33) will note Virginia Woolf in her diary one day after attending a concert in the Queen’s Hall as she reflected upon the nature of her musical experience. It is in this way that Mrs. Hilbery in Night and Day, listening to Cassandra playing Mozart on the piano, “was soon spirited away into a perfectly congenial mood, that was half reverie and half slumber, half delicious melancholy and half pure bliss” whilst on the other hand, “Mr Hilbery alone attended” as “he was extremely musical, and made Cassandra aware that he listened to every note. She played her best, and won his approval. Leaning slightly forward in his chair, and turning his little green stone, he weighed the intention of her phrases approvingly” (ND, 386-387). Again, these two responses to music, the superficial and the attentive

are dramatized in *The Years* when Edward is enviously observed by Kitty. She is always conscious of the illusion of the opera, remaining detached from the musical experience whilst on the other hand, Edward, like Mr. Hilberry in *Night and Day* is focusing all his attention on the music:

*He*, she thought, looking at the handsome boy, knows exactly what the music means. He was already completely possessed by the music. She liked the look of complete absorption that had swum up on top of his immaculate respectability, making him seem almost stern. . . . [..] He was listening, critically, intently. [..]

Kitty turned to the young man in her box. He was leaning over the ledge. He was still clapping. He was shouting “Bravo! Bravo!” He had forgotten her. He had forgotten himself.

“Wasn’t that marvellous?” he said at last, turning round.

There was an odd look on his face as if he were in two worlds at once and had to draw them together.

“Marvellous!” she agreed. She looked at him with a pang of envy. (*Y*, 197-200)

Kitty herself is not listening to the music as such, her mind wandering to actual events related to her past life as “her attention flagged”, or observing the costumes and glancing round at the audience seated in the opera-house.62

The Wanderer had come in. He was sitting on a bank in a long grey dressing-gown; and a patch wobbled uncomfortably over one of his eyes. On and on he went; on and on. Her attention flagged. She glanced round the dim red house; she could only see white elbows pointed on the ledges of boxes; here and there a sharp pinpoint of light showed as some one followed the score with a torch. Edward’s fine profile again caught her eye. He was listening, critically, intently. It wouldn’t have done, she thought, it wouldn’t have done at all. (*Y*, 198-199)

In ‘The String Quartet’ however, in stark contrast to Kitty’s response, the narrator’s response to the music is neither intensely critical of the music in a technical sense, nor is it characteristic of Kitty’s detached, inattentive, free-associative attitude: indeed, on hearing the first Act of Wagner’s opera *Siegfried*, the hammering sound of Mime

---

62 cf. also above, page 15.
forging the sword will remind Kitty of another instance of hammering—a scene from her youth:

The dwarf was hammering at the sword. Hammer, hammer, hammer, he went with little short, sharp strokes. [...] But here was Siegfried. She leant forward. Dressed in leopard-skins, very fat, with nut-brown thighs, leading a bear—here he was. Hammer, hammer, hammer he went. She leant back again. What did that make her think of? A young man who came into a room with shavings in his hair . . . when she was very young. In Oxford? She had gone to tea with them; had sat on a hard chair; in a very light room; and there was a sound of hammering in the garden. And then a boy came in with shavings in his hair. And she had wanted him to kiss her. Or was it the farm hand up at Carter’s, when old Carter had loomed up suddenly leading a bull with a ring through its nose? (Y, 197-198)

For Kitty, the music will remind her of some event which itself, in a stream of consciousness manner, will lead on to another event, totally removed from the musical experience which set off her train of thought, and while she is thinking of these events, she is not actually consciously hearing the music any more, reflected in her sketchy comments as to what is going on on the stage, hence the gaps in her attention between the moment when the curtain opens and she sees Mime forging the sword (Act I, scene 1), the moment when, a few minutes later, Siegfried enters Mime’s cave and scares him with the bear (Act I, scene 1), the moment when, twenty minutes later, the Wanderer appears (Act I, scene 2) and finally the last scene of Act I (scene 3), when Siegfried forges the sword himself.63 Only a sudden change of atmosphere, the appearance of a new character or the start of a different scene on the stage will draw her back to the opera and the music: “then the music changed. She looked at the stage again” (Y, 198). The same type of inattentive listening occurs in James Joyce’s short story ‘The Dead’, where the narrator’s attention flags as his mind wanders during Mary Jane’s performance, even though he is always aware of the musical structure, the style of the piece and her virtuosity.64 In fact, if we contrast the narrator’s response to the music in ‘The String Quartet’ to similar passages from other novels of the Modernist period, what strikes us is precisely the fact that the stream of

63 for the complete libretto of Wagner’s Siegfried, see http://www.rwagner.net/libretti/siegfried/e-t-sieg.html
64 see Appendix 3 for an extract from Joyce’s short story, ‘The Dead’ (in The Dubliners)
consciousness of the narrator’s dream-sequences excludes technical or self-conscious comments on the music and the performers which feature in the majority of fictionalized musical experiences. It also excludes the wandering thoughts of inattentive and restless listening. Miriam Henderson’s experience of the students’ concert in the first volume of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage* for instance, will render the music in a technical manner, both highlighting the quality of the performance and the character of the piece performed in technical terms, before giving us a more dream-like description of the music, the music having created in Miriam’s mind, in a similar way to Kitty in *The Years*, an unbidden association, Miriam recalling the churning wheel of a Devonshire water-mill.65 Again, there is a difference between the dramatization of a sudden recollection of a past experience as it is somehow or other suggested by the music but which then departs from the music as such, and the impersonal dream-sequences of the ‘String Quartet’ which the narrator is actually creating then and there in her imagination following the music she is hearing. The difference between the ‘String Quartet’ and the extract from *Pilgrimage* is particularly apparent in the way both narrators describe the music in terms of “clarions” and “trumpets” when it is in fact played in Woolf’s story by a string quartet and in Richardson’s novel on a piano. While these words in ‘The String Quartet’ form an integral imaginative part of the dream-narrative, they are used, in Richardson’s text, technically (albeit metaphorically) in isolation to describe a certain musical effect or colour. In a way, the “effect” of the music is more explicitly given in *Pilgrimage* as Miriam describes it from a variety of angles. Many other such passages taken from Modernist literature would highlight the originality and paradoxically atypical nature of Virginia Woolf’s narrator’s response to the music in ‘The String Quartet’.66

65 see Appendix 4 for a transcript of the passage in question from Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*

66 Even in comparison with Forster’s handling of Helen’s musical experience in the opening of the fifth chapter of *Howards End*, Forster’s text is far more explicit from a technical point of view than in Woolf’s short story, as we are told movement by movement at which point we are in the symphony itself through the bias of Tibby who points out the important transitions and “drum” beats (see Appendix 4 for extract). Forster will humourously and with utmost insight highlight in this passage from *Howards End* the many different ways one may choose to listen to music:

> it will be generally admitted that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come - of course, not so as to disturb the others - ; or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee; or like their cousin, Fraulein Mosebach, who remembers all the time that Beethoven is “echt Deutsch” ; or like Fraulein Mosebach’s young man, who can remember nothing but Fraulein Mosebach: in any case, the
It remains that for all their narrative story-telling, the “dream-sequences” are meant to express the music, indeed, they are the music, from the moment the violinist plays the first notes of the quartet. The narrator’s musical day-dreams are far from being what Peter Kivy describes as the type of amateur “listening experience” which is usually critically seen as “a semi-conscious, dreamy reverie in which one is bathed, as it were, in sound”, the type of “inattentive” superficial listening which Virginia Woolf described in Night and Day. We cannot fail to agree with Kivy when he argues that this way of listening “of course, is a way of listening to music (or, rather, a way of not listening to it”) The musical, musicological or even interdisciplinary significance of this short story would in this case pale into insignificance. But on the contrary, the dream-sequences in ‘The String Quartet’ act as a sort of impersonal literary or verbal transcription of the music itself. Indeed, in ‘The String Quartet’, the narrator is deliberately and consciously doing her best to express the music in what she thinks are the most objective, be they highly imaginative and colourful, descriptive terms. In such a way, the narrator is actually attending to the music itself, whereas the rest of the audience is listening to the way the players are performing, to their technique and mastery and to the value of the styles, revealing a certain shallowness and even snobbishness in their admiring but superficial comments regarding the playing. The Mozart string quartet is indeed an “early” Mozart at that, connoting a certain sense of disparagement for this music, as if “early” Mozarts were not of the greatest calibre and hardly worth hearing and only to be suffered because Mozart is a genius after all. This is put in stark contrast with the narrator’s own enthusiastic and intensely personal imaginative response to the music, to the extent that she becomes ashamed of her own response, feeling the need to justify herself by exclaiming on two occasions, “that’s the worst of music” (i.e. provoking dreams), compounded by the fact that, just after the second dream-sequence, she feels caught

passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings. (E.M. Forster, Howards End, London: Edward Arnold & co, 1947, pp. 32-33)

Helen’s response to Beethoven’s symphony in terms of shipwrecks, heroes, and finally goblins and elephants, is closer to the type of highly imaginative experience of Virginia Woolf’s narrator, but even so, her experience remains throughout far more individual and personal than in Woolf’s story. Her type of listening cannot be said to be inattentive as she truly is hearing goblins dancing in the music itself, but at the same time, Helen departs from the actual music by transforming it into a philosophical argument as the fearsome goblins are pitted against the “splendour of life”, the Allegro becoming an analogy for the universe itself.

67 see Kivy, Introduction to a Philosophy of Music, op.cit., p. 80
68 Ibid.
yet again day-dreaming. She resorts to trivializing what was for her, a very intense and sincere musical experience: to the patronizing comment, “that’s an early Mozart, of course”, the narrator will at first candidly answer, “but the tune, like all his tunes, make one despair – I mean hope. What do I mean?” but soon exclaims, “that’s the worst of music!”; in the second break, the narrator admits that she does not notice that the second violin is late - “no, no. I noticed nothing. That’s the worst of music – these silly dreams. The second violin was late, you say?” – because for her, the quality of the playing is quite irrelevant. The rest of the audience who do not seem to have shared her type of imaginative response to the music can only comment in shallow conventional terms on the playing, rather than on what for her was a “strange” and “exciting” musical experience, one which cannot be so easily put into words, as “the tongue is but a clapper”:

‘How lovely! How well they play! How – how – how –!’
The tongue is but a clapper. Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next to me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashes green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting.
‘How – how – how –!’ Hush! (SQ, 140)

Whereas Werner Wolf will understand the admonitory “hush” as being uttered by “some obviously interested listeners”, I would argue that the quotation marks actually indicate both times that this exclamation is in fact spoken by the narrator’s inner stream of consciousness voice as she wishes that the audience would stop their shallow chattering, described in terms of indiscriminate noise (cf. the onomatopoeic repetition of “how”), because the music is just about to start again. The narrator is in fact one of the few people actually listening to the music rather than the performance of the music. The distinction is an important one as Woolf is here dramatizing the listening experience and thus questioning the value of the musical experience per se.

Speaking of the act of listening to music, Kivy will ask

what, exactly, does a musical listener understand? There is no fictional plot – just musical events. Well, it is the musical events that are understood, in the sense that the

listener attends to those events; and, if he attends to those events, then he perceives them as happening in certain ways. [...] That person is attending to musical sound events not with a mind completely blank and bereft of thought, nor a mind occupied with thoughts and problems for which the music may serve as a soothing background, but a mind occupied with the music. [...] The music, when seriously listened to, is what philosophers would call an 'intentional object': that is to say, an object perceived under certain descriptions. [...] Music, when listened to seriously, as I have described above, is an intentional object of the listener’s attention. And what intentional object it is will depend upon what beliefs the listener has about the music. In particular, it will depend to a large degree on what musical knowledge, and what listening experience, the listener brings to the music.70

What Kivy so perceptively reveals is that any intentional listening experience will reveal a certain number of musical beliefs or prejudices, and this is precisely what we are trying to argue is the subject of ‘The String Quartet’. Virginia Woolf is indeed consciously dramatizing in this story a whole range of typical responses to music, focusing primarily on her narrator’s experience which she compares to that of the other concert-goers. Even though the dreams are made to appear spontaneous and unconscious, in each of the dream-sequences we are thus given significant “asides” spoken out by the narrator which are not part of the dream-sequences as such. The narrator is in fact making the dreams happen by trying to compose a story in her mind as she listens to the quartet, to the extent that she even finds difficulties at times in finding the words to fit the music, as her first exclamation, “it’s difficult this”, reveals (SQ, 139).71 In the last dream-sequence, the narrator has to consciously pull her thoughts back to the ongoing musical events as the story “floated off” on a tangent, as T.S. Eliot would have said,72 as she found herself carried away by her own imagination and thus created too wide a gap between the narrative and the music. This is revealed in the abrupt transition between the scene taking place outside in the castle grounds and the pursuit and flight of the lovers down the castle’s corridors:

70 see Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, op. cit., p. 80-81
71 the dream-sequences are thus consciously verbalized thoughts. This is an interesting point to which we shall return since the narrator’s dreams are deliberate verbal (or linguistic) compositions on the music, which point to an experimentation with musicalized fiction (i.e. deliberately trying to express music in words) rather than simply subconscious day-dreaming, showing that Virginia Woolf is not taking the language and words of the dreams for granted.
72 see above, page 77.
These are the lovers on the grass.

"If, madam, you will take my hand –"

"Sir, I would trust you with my heart. Moreover, we have left our bodies in the banqueting hall. Those on the turf are the shadows of our souls."

"Then these are the embraces of our souls." The lemons nod assent. The swan pushes from the bank and floats dreaming into mid-stream.

"But to return. He followed me down the corridor [...]" (SQ, 140, my italics).

The narrator thus becomes a spectator of herself dreaming the dreams, and thus enables Virginia Woolf to question their value as legitimate responses to the music, bringing to mind her own recollections of childhood in which she will describe this same disjointed feeling: "I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I was there [...] so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen." (MB, 67). Like Virginia Woolf, the narrator in 'The String Quartet' is both making the dreams happen and watching them happen.

c. Musical story-telling: a game of make-believe?

Most philosophers of music and musicologists agree that music may have features which can be perceived as expressive of extra-musical events. For Dahlhaus, "one of the central assumptions of Romantic music" is precisely a "hermeneutic model". He traces such typically Romantic "imaginative" responses to what is normally considered as "absolute music", i.e. music without a programme or any form of accompanying text or gesture, to a tradition which finds its roots in the late 18th century and the melopoetic works of the German writers Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Wackenroder. The way Dahlhaus describes Wackenroder's response to music in the 'Letter of Joseph Berglinger' in the 6th Section of the Fantasies on Art, could quite uncannily describe the musical experience of Virginia Woolf's narrator in 'The String Quartet', more than a century later. For Dahlhaus and many other critics,

the kind of listening that Wackenroder describes in "Joseph Berglinger" must seem contradictory to a reader who has grown up with the esthetic categories of the twentieth century. On the one hand, he speaks of intense concentration on the matter itself, the musical phenomenon, the topic; on the other, of 'perceptible images and new ideas' suggested by the music. And both Wackenroder and Tieck, in their Fantasies on Art, describe their impressions on hearing symphonies in a language characterized by its almost rampant metaphors.\(^7\)

Just like Joseph Berglinger, Woolf's narrator is totally immersed in the music, and just like Joseph Berglinger, she responds imaginatively with the most "shamelessly impressionistic"\(^7\) extra-musical images and ideas. Inventing a story to go with music is not altogether surprising as music can indeed easily give rise to fictional narratives and the most wildly imaginative "interpretations". As Peter Kivy will say,

> The forms of absolute music are plots without content. Or, if you like, they are purely musical stories. [...] Musical plots, like fictional ones, display 'events' for our enjoyment: in the latter, fictional events; in the former, sound events. But it cannot be emphasized too strongly, in this place, before I go on, that, although absolute music may bear an analogy to fictional narrative in the way I have just described, it is emphatically not literally fictional narrative.\(^7\)

In a similar way, Kendall Walton will point out the discrepancy between the fictional worlds which the listener can invent to go with the music and the purely musical characteristics of the music itself:

> Story worlds contain (fictional) ghosts and goblins, or murderers and detectives, or jealous lovers, or tragic heroes. [...] But if a Brandenburg Concerto has a "world," it may seem to be one that contains nothing but notes, harmonies, melodies, rhythmic motives, developments, etc. – the material of the music itself - not fictional characters and fictional events "represented" by the music. [...] One can always construct a world of the usual sort for a piece of music. One can, if one wants to, make up programs for the Brandenburg Concerti, tell stories to go with them – stories about ghosts and

\(^7\) ibid., p. 82.
\(^7\) see above page 78.
\(^7\) Peter Kivy, Introduction to a Philosophy of Music, op. cit., p. 79.
goblins or murderers and detectives, or whatever one allows the music to suggest. But such stories seem irrelevant at best to an understanding of the music, and they are more likely to hinder than to enhance appreciation.77

To return to Kivy:

it is so easy to put fictional stories to absolute music. All you need do is fit your fictions to that music. Whatever that is, however, it is not interpretation. Interpretation tells us what is there, not what we can put there with little more effort than we exert in seeing things in clouds. To show that absolute music ‘means’ requires more than merely showing that it ‘could have meant,’ since its structures are expressive and capable of pictorial and structural representation. What must be shown is that absolute music exists as a representational or linguistic system. And that, so far as I know, has never been shown by any of those who practice the fictional or representational interpretation of the absolute music repertoire.78

As the narrator in ‘The String Quartet’ appears to show the imaginative behaviour of a “person of limited musical sense”, whose self-confessed childish musical experience (the narrator even briefly returns to childhood as the music makes her see how “the feathers in the hat next me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle.”) would not seem to have much more value than that of the descriptions of whales, boats and angels seen in the shapes of clouds, the narrator’s musical “insight” would therefore seem to be of no real interest to us. In a similar way, Susanne K. Langer, in a seminal treatise on representation and symbolism, will say of such “imaginings” that even though they are a “perfectly legitimate practice, common among musically limited persons”, carried out even by such renowned artists as Goethe to find a “conception which could underlie” the music he heard,79 they are merely imaginative “crutches”.80 In such a way, she absolutely rejects any serious undertakings to grasp the artistic significance of music in that manner as, for her, “it is a denial of the true nature of music, which is unconventionalized, unverbalized freedom of thought”.81

---

81 my italics – we shall return to her conception of musical meaning below.
Nothing can prevent our falling back on mental pictures, fantasies, memories, or having a *Sphärenerlebnis* of some sort, when we cannot directly make subjective sense out of music in playing or hearing it. A program is simply a crutch. It is a resort to the crude but familiar method of holding feelings in the imagination by envisaging their attendant circumstances. It does not mean that the listener is unmusical, but merely that he is not musical enough to think in entirely musical terms. He is like a person who understands a foreign language, but thinks in his mother tongue the minute an intellectual difficulty confronts him.

To a person of limited musical sense, such ideation seems the most valuable response to music, the “subjective content” which the listener must supply.\(^2\)

These critics certainly seem quite unanimous in agreeing that such an approach to music is to be most definitely frowned upon and certainly not in the good books of any self-respecting musicologist. In stark contrast to these theories though, Kendall Walton, in a controversial paper on musical representation which shocked the “purists” amongst musicologists,\(^3\) tried to argue that creating “fictional worlds”\(^4\) to suit the music is, in fact, a legitimate practise, even in the case of absolute music, endeavouring to bridge the “gaping chasm [...] between (absolute music) on the one hand and painting and literature on the other”,\(^5\) which was perceptively noted by Harold Child, as he objected to Virginia Woolf’s “representative” attitude to music.\(^6\) In fact, for Walton, inventing stories to fit absolute music is one of the major aesthetic roles of music. As he will say,

> distinguishing “absolute” music from program music is not nearly as easy as one might have expected. There is no sharp line between explicit and subtle program music, or between subtle program music and music that is as unprogrammatic as it gets, and one can be puzzled about the location even of fuzzy lines.\(^7\)

An example of this type of “subtle” programme music can be found in Debussy’s *Préludes* for piano in which the composer placed titles at the end of the pieces,

---


\(^3\) see in particular Peter Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts – an Essay in Differences*, *op.cit.*, p.45


\(^5\) *ibid.*

\(^6\) cf. page 114

\(^7\) Kendall Walton, *op.cit.*, p. 47.
suggesting thereby that the music is not meant to be heard as direct programme music, but rather as an analogy to the sort of imaginative world expressed in the title.\textsuperscript{88} In what could be seen as trying to have the best of both worlds, Walton in fact, argues that in music “there are just the notes, and they themselves don’t call for imagining anything”\textsuperscript{89} and as such, they cannot be considered as “a prop in a game of make-believe”,\textsuperscript{90} but at the same time they give us the imaginative modalities to create our own fictions. For him, the music does not express a (fictional) world in itself - what Walton calls a “work world”, i.e. the highly detailed imaginative worlds which are created in novels or paintings. On the contrary, it is precisely the abstract or \textit{musical} (technical) qualities of the music which lead us to create our own fictional worlds or experience our own fictional feelings because music as such induces us to listen with imagination. The aesthetic role of music therefore, for Walton, is to make us use our imagination. In this context, for Walton, the value of music lies in the freedom which it gives us to invent the most personal and far-fetched narratives or feelings to go with it, and that is, for him, the be-all and end-all of all musical experiences, as he concludes his essay by saying that “the absence of a work world does not, however, prevent the listener’s imagination from running wild, as she participates in her game of make-believe”.\textsuperscript{91} The narrator’s imagination in ‘The String Quartet’ is certainly “running wild” as she plays her game of make-believe. Virginia Woolf’s story however would pose no problems at all for Walton as it could be read quite naturally as a (positive) example of the fictionalization of music. In such a way, it could be said that the Mozart of ‘The String Quartet’ is like a map, however unreferential it may be to start with (and Walton wouldn’t disagree with this), by which we may explore a network of far from abstract dream-narratives. The highly imaginative responses to the music in ‘The String Quartet’ are not a token of the music itself, but rather of the narrator’s imagination. The dream-sequences could therefore be legitimately taken to be about dreaming and story-telling, more than being any reflection on the music being listened to, which does not however mean that the musical backdrop is

\textsuperscript{88} Marguerite Long, Alfred Cortot and François Lesure thought that the titles were secondary to the music, cf. Francis Dubé, ‘Les Préludes pour Piano de Claude Debussy, Recherche en Education Musicale, Université Laval, No. 21, Janvier 2003, pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{89} Kendall Walton, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{ibid.} p. 52.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{ibid.} p. 60.
irrelevant. Rather, according to Walton, the musical backdrop demands to be taken as a springboard for these dreams.

We need not go further at this point into the theories as to how absolute music may or may not justifiably give rise to imaginary narratives and interpretations,\textsuperscript{92} i.e. be representative or have semantic content, as this would go too far afield from our present investigation and has been well documented over the years in various philosophies of music,\textsuperscript{93} but it however remains to be said, and this is at the heart of our own problematic, that up to this day, there is still a conceptual blank in the gap between the music itself, as what is heard, and what we make of it, i.e. the potential mental understanding or appreciation of it. Indeed, the hearing of what is heard,\textsuperscript{94} that is, the consciousness of what is heard, always evades description as such. Kivy will describe this epistemological gap as the “black box of music”:

Let us, then, treat music, in this regard, as what the scientists call a ‘black box’: that is to say, a machine whose inner workings are unknown to us. [...] We know what goes in: the musical features that, for three centuries, have been associated with the particular emotions music is expressive of. And we know what goes out: the expressive qualities the music is heard to be expressive of.\textsuperscript{95}

The ‘what is heard’ can indeed be easily described in a multiplicity of manners, from the traditional musical analyses, the most extreme of which assert that music is a closed non- or self-referential system which can only be understood from within with a technical internal vocabulary, itself created from within (cf. the ‘formalist’ approach\textsuperscript{96}), to what is considered (by the formalists or purists) as the subjective and representative descriptive approaches we have touched upon above, or even to the


\textsuperscript{93} As Peter Kivy in his chapter on ‘Narration and Representation’ will clearly outline, the structures of music are indeed capable of representing, or standing for, non-musical structures in the same way as non-Euclidean geometries, which were originally pure mathematics, were then used to illustrate and represent a new scientific view of the physical world. One of the most “fashionable” interpretations of music today is to consider it as expressing “plot-archetypes”, for instance, p. 142. For Kivy however, it remains to be proven that music is a representational or linguistic system in itself. See Peter Kivy, \textit{Introduction to a Philosophy of Music}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198-199.


\textsuperscript{95} Kivy, \textit{Introduction to a Philosophy of Music}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{ibid.}, p. 68.
psychological or neurological experiments involving brain scans, which endeavour to describe what happens in the brain when one listens to music.\textsuperscript{97} All of these, however, feel they have the only justified approach in truly understanding the gap between music itself and the meaning(s) and value we attribute to music. But they all fall short of giving satisfactory answers to the questions, such as why is music important, why do we listen to music, what precisely is it in music which we are relentlessly drawn towards, and in our particular case, why is music given a paradigmatical value leading it to be considered as a model in the musicalization of fiction and why did Virginia Woolf in particular turn to music as a frame of reference for her own literary expression?\textsuperscript{98} In ‘The String Quartet’, Virginia Woolf, by bringing to life the narrator’s stream of consciousness as she listens to music, is in fact exploring the very “gap” between music and language, Kivy’s conceptual “black box”.

d. The musical paradigm in the literary tradition: representation \textit{versus} non-referentiality

Melvin Friedman has argued that very often the Modernist authors themselves like to show off their technical virtuosity by asserting their allegiance to other forms of artistic expression, and mirroring this, Werner Wolf will say that the superficial recourse to musical metaphors in contemporary literary criticism is, in a similar way, simply a token of implicit admiration\textsuperscript{99} for what they think is an appealing style of writing. Such a stance, on the part of both the critics and the authors, is derived for the most part, as we shall see, from certain Romantic notions of musical transcendence and a hierarchy of the arts which places music at the summit, rather than any serious reflection upon a truly musical understanding of prose, even though the abundance of sketchy pseudo-musicological comments in Woolfian criticism does tend to shed a

\textsuperscript{97} see the work done on music and neuroimaging at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center/Harvard Medical School: http://www.musicianbrain.com/ and related publications: http://www.musicianbrain.com/publications.html.

\textsuperscript{98} in particular if we consider that music has been a paradigm for the arts since the Romantic era (cf. Dahlhaus, ‘Absolute Music as Esthetic Paradigm’, Chapter I, \textit{op.cit.}), which these Modernist authors are precisely consciously reacting to.

\textsuperscript{99} Werner Wolf, \textit{The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 4.
disreputable light on interdisciplinarity investigations in general and the significance of Woolf’s own understanding of music in particular. According to Scher, the terminological impressionism which has often undermined attempts at interdisciplinary criticism, and to which we shall return in subsequent chapters, finds its roots, in the “remnants of the romantic sensibility [...], a practice which can be traced back through the symbolists to the romanticists' cultivation of the amalgamation and confusion of the arts”,\(^\text{100}\) which have “little to do with the art of music or with profitable literary criticism”.\(^\text{101}\) In such a way, we may quote Harold Child, in a review which we shall return to at greater length below, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Virginia Woolf’s 1921 collection of short stories *Monday or Tuesday*, who reveals the affinities between Woolf’s innovative use of prose, the new style of “unrepresentational art which is creeping across from painting”\(^\text{102}\) and music. He will say of *Monday or Tuesday*,

\[
\text{not that it means too little that is intelligible to the plain mind, but that it cannot help meaning too much for its purpose. Prose may 'aspire to the condition of music'; it cannot reach it.}^{103}
\]

Besides bringing into play the concepts of meaning and referentiality which are indeed at the core of any musico-literary aesthetics, in particular within the Modernist context and which we shall discuss below, and despite the overt irony which underpins his criticism, it is undeniable that Child certainly nailed the problem down with great lucidity. It may be well at this point to pause an instant to consider the complex ramifications suggested by Child’s allusion to Pater’s notoriously ambivalent and quasi axiomatic phrase that “all arts aspire to the condition of music” in relation to Woolf’s style. This will set the stage for our own investigation and hopefully lay to rest a certain number of prevalent and recurrent reservations and prejudices which seem to arise whenever interart experiments are in question, in particular those between music and literature. If we bear in mind that Virginia Woolf herself admitted

\(^{100}\) Steven Paul Scher, 'How meaningful is 'Musical' in Literary Criticism?' (1972), in Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.40
\(^{101}\) *ibid.*
\(^{103}\) *ibid.*, p. 87-88
that she always thought of her books “as music” before she wrote them \((L6: 426)\), any reference to Pater’s aesthetics of art, which Woolf was indeed familiar with, can only reflect but the tip of our melopoetic iceberg.

The idea that absolute music was a paradigm for the other arts was not invented by Walter Pater – his formulation, “all arts aspire to the condition of music”, has simply become a handy key phrase, a symbol of the terms of a fundamental debate concerning the meaning of absolute music, that is, instrumental music with no explicit textual or verbal associations. Even the multiplicity of phrases used to describe such instrumental music, reflect its highly problematical nature: “absolute music” and “pure music” connote a certain transcendence, whilst “music alone”, coined more recently by Peter Kivy,\(^\text{104}\) is an endeavour to try and distanciate himself from the implications of transcendental value which such a formulation possesses (which is in itself taking a stance within the debate as to the “value” and meaning of music). In his historical overview of the idea of absolute music, Carl Dahlhaus significantly centres the debate surrounding “absolute” music versus “programme” or “vocal” music within a frame of musico-literary interdisciplinarity.\(^\text{105}\) First of all, the “music aesthetics – the verbal expression of musical phenomena and problems” are just as dependent on “the development of literary esthetics” as “on changes in music itself”, since from a contextualized historical/cultural perspective,

the language used to discuss music directly affects the music as it represents itself in the listener’s consciousness, the esthetics of literature, on whose categories and formulae the esthetics of music feeds, belongs to the determining factors of a history of music that does not exhaust itself in the history of musical technique.\(^\text{106}\)

Dahlhaus though, will continue by tracing the highly controversial notion of the transcendent, immanent, metaphysical and therefore \textit{paradigmatic} nature of “absolute” purely instrumental music back to a certain nostalgia in the Western musical thought of the past four hundred years towards the music of Ancient Greece, perceived as a model for the “modern” conception of music, i.e. music understood as a fusion of harmony, rhythm and language, and the subsequent highly controversial

\(^{105}\) Carl Dahlhaus, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 8.
\(^{106}\) \textit{ibid.}, p. 55.
split, at a time when composers started writing for instrumental ensembles alone in the eighteenth century, between purely instrumental music and music such as opera and song, which continued to incorporate language into its expressive modalities.\textsuperscript{107} Thus, there exists for Dahlhaus a perpetual and fundamental dichotomy, a “gaping abyss”,\textsuperscript{108} in musical aesthetics up to this day between the conception of music within a history of music which considers absolute music as “antithesis and intermediate stage in a dialectic process”, that is, instrumental music as being inferior or deficient in a way because it lacks the representational element (be it language, or dramatic representations such as ballet) which would give it “meaning”, and so is constantly striving towards regaining and fusing with its linguistic origins (manifesting itself in the primacy of the melodic phrase seen as the musical imitation of a linguistic phrase), and a Romantic “ontology”, where absolute music, because it is seen to be beyond language, gives us an “intimation of the infinite” and “touches the essence of things”,\textsuperscript{109} an essence which is itself beyond language,\textsuperscript{110} thus placing absolute music above language. This manifests itself in the \textit{primaute} of the harmony or symphony above melody which is seen to be too close to song, and therefore language. For Dahlhaus, “the archaizing esthetic that tends to demote absolute music to a deficient type” is constantly pitted against “the romantic metaphysics that presents absolute music as the true music”.\textsuperscript{111} What is however apparent, is that this fundamental debate hinges less on music itself, be it absolute or otherwise, than on language, on the relation of music to language, and that of language to music. And by “language” is here broadly meant a system of referentiality based on clearly delineated signs or symbols, a form of expression which links thoughts, concepts, ideas and imaginary objects to a tangible external “reality”. As Susanne K. Langer says, it is very difficult to conceive of music independently of language, as “the rubrics established by language are absolute so that any other semantic must make the same distinctions as discursive thought”.\textsuperscript{112} Even when absolute music is considered a paradigm for all

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{ibid.}, Chapter I.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{ibid.}, pp. 25-26.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{ibid.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{110} cf. “it seems peculiarly hard for our literal minds to grasp the idea that anything can be known which cannot be named”, Susanne K. Langer, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{111} Carl Dahlhaus, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{112} We therefore seem to have only two alternatives: either absolute music as paradigm or language/representation as paradigm.
other arts, a sort of language above language, a transcendence, it is defined by the fact that it is a non-referential mode of expression.

For Pater and Child and many other aestheticians, musicologists and philosophers of art, what lies at the root of the matter is the notion of referentiality. In such a way, the notions of meaning and expression, and the problem of referentiality and representation which underlie Modernist aesthetics, have placed music in the limelight for the simple reason that whatever similarities music and language or music and prose may or may not have, there is one fundamental difference in that the material of prose, words, are considered to be referential, whereas the “material” of music, musical tones, are not. A word will always refer to something which is separate from its own plasticity – a word with no meaning or sense, wouldn’t be a “word” as such, but a sound or a squiggle on the page. Whereas a note of music does not refer to anything other than itself. If you hear a G sharp, it does not stand for anything else but the sound which we have named “G sharp”. On the other hand, it would be possible to argue that notes in themselves are not meant to be meaningful just as the letters which make up words have no “meaning” as such, the letter “a” is the sound /a/ and the written image “a”, in the same way as the G sharp is the sound G sharp and the corresponding black dot written in the score – it is the combination of notes, like the combination of letters which creates a structure of relations between themselves – letters combining to make words, words combining to make sentences, etc., notes combining to make musical themes, chords, phrases and harmonic progressions. But whereas a word is meant to represent an object or a concept and as object in itself has very little value (the word “chair” is simply a way to bring to mind the object “chair” and the combination of the letters c h a i and r or the sound / tʃæ/ have no meaning in themselves (bar the uses of the sounds/aspect of words for their purely sonic properties in poetry, which is a different matter altogether), a musical phrase does not have any direct clear-cut referential purpose, or if so, a very controversial one.

For Harold Child, Woolf’s stories fail precisely because of language’s intrinsic and inescapable referentiality and the “musicality” of the stories which form Monday or Tuesday is inversely proportional to the clarity and unequivocality of the

113 when speaking about music, we are referring to “absolute” instrumental music unless otherwise specified.
referentiality of the language. Even though Virginia Woolf’s style of writing “aspires to the condition of music”, that is, absolute non-referential music, it cannot reach it because of the intrinsic dichotomy between language’s referentiality and music’s non-referentiality. Language can never be non-referential in the way music can be because by becoming non-referential, it denatures itself and simply passes over the edge and becomes a form of music. In such a way, language can never attain the particular quality of expressiveness which music does since music owes this expressiveness to something which intrinsically escapes referential language, i.e. unreferentiality. Prose, being irreversibly different from music, cannot take from music any tangible techniques without actually becoming music as such. Virginia Woolf may aspire to a musical form of writing but as long as her material, words, cannot escape their referentiality, she will always fall short of what makes music expressive. Thus, comparing the obscurity of the language with a type of literary musicality would then be a delusion, a catch-22 situation: prose aspires to the condition of music, music is unreferential, to write musically therefore, would be to write unreferentially but language is by nature referential, so it is essentially impossible to write musical prose even though prose aspires to it, because, as Child says, prose may never reach music’s particular type of expressiveness which for him is contained within its unreferentiality. In her essay “On Craftsmanship”, Woolf will clearly say of words that “it is the nature of words to mean many things” (‘Craftsmanship’, CE2: 247). Her prose will either always “mean” too much to be truly musical, since for Child, music is intrinsically unreferential, or mean too little and then truly become “incomprehensible”, words becoming mere sounds. In such a way, the less the story seems to “mean”, the more it tends towards the musical. It is the short story after which the collection was named, ‘Monday or Tuesday’, which most “aspires to the condition of music” because of the way Woolf has played with the ambiguous and ambivalent potential of the words’ referentiality, whereas ‘The String Quartet’, the story within the collection which has a direct link to music, shows on the contrary that “while Mrs Woolf listens to music she is thinking, not in terms of music, but of life – she is making music ‘represent’”. What Child unwittingly reveals here is that, strangely enough, the one story which focuses on music deals with “life” rather than

114 Harold Child, op.cit., p. 87.
115 ibid. p. 88.
music, whilst a story about “life-full things – the heron flying, the busy street, the fire-lit room, and others”\textsuperscript{116} is seen to verge on the edge of music through its apparent absurdity and meaninglessness. For Child, it is both a question of a difference in “purpose” and a difference in mode of expression - or, as Pater will say, in “material” - and as opposed to Pater, he admits no possible bridge between the expressive modalities of language and those of music. Pater will himself say that each art has its own “special responsibilities to its material”, and it is the task of the aesthetic criticism “to estimate the degree in which a given work of art fulfils its responsibilities to its special material”. If such were the case, our investigation of the influence of music upon literature would come to an abrupt halt at this point and we would simply have to close the matter and put an end to the debate – prose is prose, music is music and never the twain shall meet since not only are their materials different, but their purpose is different as well. Any parallels would merely be metaphorical, subjective and quite insignificant in concrete terms. We would be readily prepared to agree with Child and Pater and many other past and present aestheticians and critics that, to a certain extent, there are differences between music and literature and that these differences occur not only on the material plane, which is understandable, but more importantly on the conceptual plane, which is more problematical. But it is precisely on this conceptual plane that we are ready to argue the point and say that prose may certainly aspire to the condition of music, in certain given circumstances. We would certainly do well to read Pater’s whole essay, ‘The School of Giorgione’ in \textit{The Renaissance}, as it so clearly reveals one of the reasons behind the methodological muddles which characterize so many unconvincing interdisciplinary investigations and which have generated so many idle discussions as to the relevance and modalities of interdisciplinarity itself. As Pater will say,

\begin{quote}

\textit{it is the mistake of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music, and painting - all the various products of art – as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities of colour, in painting; of sound, in music; of rhythmical words, in poetry.}\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{ibid}. p. 87. We return to this short story in the last section of Chapter 3.

What is interesting in Pater’s discussion of the arts and aesthetic criticism is that he highlights the fact that the boundaries which occur so conspicuously between the different art forms on the expressive or “material” level tend to obscure the fact that these also occur on the conceptual level. Not only are prose and music different forms of expression, but they have a different aesthetic compass as well, an aesthetic compass whose breadth is determined by their highly individual modes of expression. Pursuing the investigation of the influence of music on literature primarily on the level of the translations of “media” (“media” from the Latin “medium”, what is in the middle, the intermediary), as the newly coined term “intermedial” rather suggests, has indeed more often than not taken precedence over an investigation of the potential translations between the different imaginative conceptions of each individual art form. By thus deflecting the enquiry away from the more fundamental overarching problem of artistic expression and aesthetics in general, does this not obscure the underlying concern which so many artists of the Modernist period show towards other mediums of expression and other modes of experience, that is, a fundamental interest in the conception of art in general? Child is right in a sense that prose may never reach the condition of music for the simple fact that, to state the obvious, prose as such is not music, and music is not prose. Their mutual intersections however may also occur on the aesthetic and conceptual levels and not just the medial.

A closer look at the narrator’s response to the actual music in Woolf’s short story, ‘The String Quartet’, is quite enlightening and we shall focus on this in the following chapter. Certain general features of the modalities of her musical experience are present throughout, in particular the link between musical expression and literary (or linguistic) expression and the relation between music and the stream of consciousness. In each and every dream-sequence, Virginia Woolf is indeed experimenting with the shortcomings of the verbalization of music, which in itself raises numerous musicological issues. At the same time, however, each dream-sequence is in itself an exploration and a critique of a particular type of musical response. We shall therefore focus in Chapter 3 on the specific features of each dream-sequence in relation to the broader interdisciplinary and/or musicological questions they raise before attempting to give an interpretation of the story as a whole as it relates in particular to Virginia Woolf’s literary aesthetics.
Whereas Chapter 2 brought to light the more general interdisciplinary aspects of the question of the representation of music in extra-musical terms as exemplified in 'The String Quartet', we shall go one step further in Chapter 3 in order to analyse in more detail the specific modalities of the nature of Woolf's Modernist interest in representing the life of the mind in terms of music. We shall first address the question of the relations between music and the stream of consciousness illustrated by an analysis of the first dream-sequence of Woolf's short story. From there we shall proceed to an investigation of the role of the musical paradigm in the context of a redefinition of the modalities of the expression of emotions in Modernist literature. This will lead us to study the second dream-sequence in terms of a Woolfian critique of Romantic sentimentalism, and following that, to explore Woolf's criticism of the poor expressive value of the purely "visual" emotions in the context of a "cinematographic" style of writing in which music as non-referential mode of expression is given as an alternative model. Finally, we analyse the way Woolf moves beyond a purely psychological understanding of the musical paradigm in order to reveal how music plays a literal phenomenological role in Woolf's conception of our experience of life itself by analysing the fourth dream-sequence and proceeding to re-contextualize the narrator's responses to music in relation to the opening section of the story - what we call the "orts, scraps and fragments" of the pre-concert assembly -, thus giving a final interpretation of the musical import of the story as a whole within the context of Woolf's aesthetics of art. In order to keep each strand of an otherwise complex demonstration as clearly delineated as possible, we shall proceed as follows: we shall study each aspect individually by discussing the musical and literary implications of the particular type of aesthetic response dramatized at each stage of the story and by highlighting the melopoetic modalities which are brought into play at a stylistic level. At the crux of this chapter, in preparation for our study of the musicalization of Woolf's novels in Chapters four and five, is the question of the very nature of the musical paradigm: to what extent is the musical model understood by Woolf as having the potential to play more than a merely metaphorical role in her literary aesthetics?
a. The musicalization of the stream of consciousness

(i) The Modernist turn to music

There is something far more significant to be gleaned from the relation between music and mind in the Modernist musicalization of the stream of consciousness than the notion that music is merely a background support, a mere pretext for the expression of passing thoughts. The narrator's choice of imagery in 'The String Quartet' is indeed far from being a collection of totally random thoughts. One of the reasons for giving music a paradigmatical status is the relation it is seen to bear with the consciousness. It is indeed true that depicting the consciousness by means of a musical performance has certain undeniable advantages, as the author can focus exclusively on the thoughts of his characters as they listen to the music, without having to be too concerned about suggesting the actual music played, since in the end, the focus of the story would be on the processes of the consciousness and not on the music. It is certainly easier to show the imagination "at work" if you give it a pretext to imagine and what better pretext can one find than music, whose versatile expression is open to so many imaginative and aesthetic responses, as we have seen above. On the other hand, it could be argued that it would be just as easy to show the mind or the imagination of the characters at work by simply sitting them on a bench and letting their thoughts wander as the fancy takes them. What is it about the specifically musical experience which fascinates so many Modernist authors? Whilst we cannot answer this question for all authors, looking at Virginia Woolf's own understanding of the matter will shed some light on the issue.

Alex Aronson describes Virginia Woolf's recourse to music in 'The String Quartet' as a means to express the workings of the mind rather than an end in itself:

The more the writer realized the need for increasingly subtler forms of evocation than the prose of everyday life was capable of expressing, the more was he likely to look in music for an objective equivalent for emotions that might have been more adequately expressed through poetry as they were too complex to be conveyed in conventional speech. Virginia Woolf, in an early story, probably written in 1921, before she became acquainted with Proust's work, illustrates this search for a new language when she
describes the effect of a string quartet by Mozart on a listener, evidently herself, tortured, as she then was, by a sense of loss and inner division.\(^1\)

Like MacCarthy,\(^2\) Aronson sees the music as being simply a convenient scaffolding for the representation of thought and does not consider the story itself to be a significant instance of the musicalization of fiction but rather an experiment in a type of Modernist narrative derived from psychology. Aronson thus continues by arguing that

the experimental nature of this short, fragmentary sketch is of considerable interest to anyone concerned with the gradual dissolution of conventional thematic structure and its effect on the portrayal of human thought in contemporary fiction. The novelty of this approach to the hearer – the music being the medium through which human consciousness is portrayed – points backwards to Proust's impressionistic literary experiments with music as well as towards Joyce's more daring representation of the stream of consciousness still to come.\(^3\)

Within the context of a more widespread Modernist interest in the relation between musical expression and the "portrayal of human thought", in particular the experimentation with a potential musicalization of the stream of consciousness, it is hardly surprising if Virginia Woolf's 1921 melopoetic experiment is seen indeed to be characteristic of certain Modernist trends, but as we shall see, it also illustrates the way the Modernists paradoxically appropriated some notions of nineteenth century musical transcendence in order to break those nineteenth century literary frameworks which they were so wary of.

It is impossible and quite superfluous at this point to go in great detail into what has been seen as a well-documented reaction against the traditional realism which prevailed throughout the nineteenth century and which would take us too far afield from the subject in hand. It is indeed not our purpose to examine the general musical and literary aesthetics of the period, nor to give a detailed account of the modalities and technicalities of melopoetic studies \textit{in totum}, as these have already been

---

\(^1\) Alex Aronson, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 29-30.
\(^2\) see page 75.
\(^3\) Alex Aronson, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 29-30.
investigated in specific studies. Suffice to say that writers sought to break the existing literary framework and develop a new style of writing, which would be truer to “life” than what they considered was an artificially contrived realism which, in its attention to story-telling, plot, plausibility and action, left very little place to the expression of the subtle, quasi imperceptible nuances of the mind and the imagination, at a moment when psychology was becoming very much à la mode during the last years of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as artists and philosophers sought to map the complex workings of the consciousness. Not only did the traditional themes usually found in novels (i.e. the life-history of the characters, description of social milieux, etc.) become inadequate as they reflected an “external” point of view rather than exploring the “internal” workings of the mind, but most importantly, the traditional literary forms - the idea of plot, story-line, suspense and plausibility - were also put into question as they were subservient to the realistic, story-telling characteristics of the realist/social novel of the end of the nineteenth century. Virginia Woolf’s own aesthetics certainly fit into the wider Modernist picture, and it must be noted that she herself, an avid reader and renowned literary critic, was extremely aware and critical of the emergence of these new literary trends, often discussing the matter with her fellow novelists. She will thus speak of the amazement which “fills us now that we have sifted myriads of words and gone along uncharted ways in search of new forms for our new sensations” (‘Hours in a Library’, E2: 60). The novel in particular was a form of artistic expression which was seen to merit the attention which had up to then been primarily given to other literary genres.

In such a way, in a survey of modernist art and aesthetics, Thomas Harrison focuses on what he describes as the far-reaching dramatic cultural and aesthetic revolution which took place in the first years of the twentieth century and which he perceives in all artistic domains, in particular in the visual arts, music and literature. Interestingly, he takes as starting point Virginia Woolf’s perceptive observation that

---


on or about December 1910, human character changed”,7 in order to show how these
debut du siècle artists were preoccupied with how the internal functions of the mind
shaped “human character” rather than the external, historical events which were such
an important feature of nineteenth century literature:

At the end of King Edward's reign, as Woolf argues in this essay from the twenties,
people suddenly became conscious of needs they never knew that they had. Up until
1910, artists had considered the needs of human nature to be adequately reflected by the
material and historical conditions in which it was rooted. But at the end of the first
decade external situations appeared to have lost their revelatory power, their complicity,
as it were, with inner intention. Scientists and philosophers began to wonder whether
the most well-established truths were nothing more than matters of impression and
mood, of perspective and judgment. Positivism, realism, and naturalism appeared to
have forsaken the subject they first intended to serve, but of which they had never really
spoken: the human subject, the psyche, self, or however one wished to call it - the
innermost truth of subjective experience - which was improperly reflected by historical
events.8

Or as Virginia Woolf will say,

the problem before the novelist at present, as we suppose it to have been in the past, is
to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the
courage to say that what interests him is no longer “this” but “that”: out of “that” alone
must he construct his work. For the moderns “that”, the point of interest, lies very likely
in the dark places of psychology. At once, therefore, the accent falls a little differently;
the emphasis is upon something hitherto ignored; at once a different outline of form
becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to our predecessors.
(‘Modern Fiction’, E4: 162)

7 cf. Virginia Woolf, ‘Character in Fiction’ (later reworked into ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’), E3:
421. The choice of the year 1910 was possibly motivated by Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist Exhibition
of November 1910 which, at the time, was highly controversial -, as well as the fact that 1910 saw the
death of Edward VII and the coronation of George V and she is making a distinction between what she
describes as the old “Edwardian” novelists (such as Arnold Bennett) and the new “Georgian” novelists
(among whom she counts James Joyce, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, etc.), see E3: 437, ft. 4. Virginia
Woolf will refer again to the shift of aesthetic and artistic views at the turn of the century in particular
mentioning the difficulty the modernist novelists encountered in “adapting” to this “new interpretation
8 Thomas Harrison, op.cit., p.15.
The début-du-siècle novelists were in desperate need of new bearings by which they could steer and Virginia Woolf would "think about writing, instead of writing, and find all these problems awfully difficult" (L3: 211). In 1925, she will ask Janet Case, what is form? What is character? What is a novel? Think them out for me. The truth is of course that no one for 100 years has given a thought to novels, as they have done to poetry: and now we wake up, suffocated, to find ourselves completely in the dark. But its an interesting age, you'll admit. Only, for a novelist, confusing. (L3: 211)

Virginia Woolf thus hoped that the "novel of the future" would "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall... trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" ('Modern Novels', E3: 33-34). The "greatest book in the world" would thus be made "entirely solely and with integrity of one's thoughts" before these thoughts became "works of art" through the linguistic process:

Suppose one could catch them before they became "works of art"? Catch them hot and sudden as they rise in the mind - walking up Asheham hill for instance. Of course one cannot; for the process of language is slow and deluding. One must stop to find a word. Then, there is the form of the sentence, soliciting one to fill it. (D3: 102)

Virginia Woolf will often contend that her best novel was actually an unwritten one, to the point of sending a completely blank copy of To the Lighthouse to Vita Sackville-West in 1927, inscribing on the front page: "in my opinion the best novel I have ever written" (L3: 372). In 1928, she wrote of the Modern novel being on the "far side" of language:

I believe that the main thing in beginning a novel is to feel, not that you can write it, but that it exists on the far side of a gulf, which words can't cross: that its to be pulled through only in a breathless anguish. When I sit down to an article, I have a net of words which will come down on the idea certainly in an hour or so. But a novel, as I say, to be good should seem, before one writes it, something unreadable: but only visible; so that for nine months one lives in despair, and only when one has forgotten what one meant, does the book seem tolerable. I assure you, all my novels were first rate before they were written. (L3: 529)
In a letter to Quentin Bell in March 1929, she will admit that “the Moths [...] will never be so good as it is now in my mind unwritten” (L4: 35). More than simply an account of those “dark places of psychology” which are often prone to excessive “scientific” handling in some Modern novels, for Virginia Woolf, the novel of the future, would also “give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude” (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 435) as well as “our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death and fate” (E4: 435). Language itself was perceived to be a hindrance in the expression of these subtle thoughts and motions of the mind as it constantly checked the expression of the “flight of the mind” (D5: 298) - an expression particularly dear to Virginia Woolf as it expressed the elusive nature of the mind processes - or worse still, distorted the meaning the author wished to convey. This led Virginia Woolf to describe this linguistic barrier as the “screen of language” (‘The Sad Years’, E2: 286). She will thus ask,

is there [...] some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and, if so, could this be made visible to the eye? Is there any characteristic which thought possesses that can be rendered visible without the help of words? It has speed and slowness; dartlike directness and vaporous circumlocution. (‘The Cinema/The Movies and Reality’ in E4: 594, Appendix ii)

The fact that the Modernists sought to express in words something that is seen to intrinsically escape referential language, i.e. the thought process itself, is what we may call the “Modernist paradox” as its terms are self-exclusive. How does one express in words something whose essential nature is to elude words? How can one express the speed of the unarticulated, intuitive or even subconscious thought

9 cf. Virginia Woolf, ‘Freudian Fiction’, E3: 196-197: “The triumphs of science are beautifully positive. But for novelists the matter is much more complex; and should they, like Mr Beresford, possess a conscience, the question how far they should allow themselves to be influenced by the discoveries of the psychologists is by no means simple. [...] Yes, says the scientific side of the brain, that is interesting; that explains a great deal. No, says the artistic side of the brain, that is dull and has no human significance whatever. Snubbed and discouraged, the artist retreats; and before the end of the book the medical man is left in possession of the field; all the characters have become cases; and our diagnosis is now so assured that a boy of six has scarcely opened his lips before we detect in him unmistakable symptoms of the prevailing disease.”

10 cf. PA: 392-393 and E4: 44.
processes in a language bogged down by its own discursive slowness? Or, to go a step further, how does one communicate abstraction with concrete tools? As Harrison puts it, at the beginning of the twentieth century, "subjectivity has no voice but that which speaks by contorting the same terms it wishes to escape". Harrison thus sees this "inward turn" as the culmination of a process of "self-destruction" initiated in the last years of the nineteenth century:

At the moment in time when artists make the most exasperated call for the inward turn, they also discover its dire and inevitable consequence: the obliteration, in the attack on rhetoric, of the basis for even those interiorized narratives that Woolf imagined. Indeed, the commitment to subjective experience in 1910 marks more of an end than a beginning of a tradition, which reaches an impasse at the very moment that it becomes most extreme, giving rise to the suspicion that all seemingly self-expressive persons are silenced by the idioms they use.

Silenced by their own inability to express in a representative language, be it linguistic or pictural, these interior wordless worlds of thoughts and emotions, the puzzling and ambivalent nature of (wordless) musical expression offered an example of an alternative form of artistic communication from which they could learn and remodel their own art. Thus was born the alluring parallel between the musical idiom and what they perceived as the non-verbal "language" of the mind. The "modernist interest in music", as Eric Prieto terms it in his study of the question, is often seen to have its roots within this aesthetic crisis of début du siècle artistic expression in general, in particular the gap between the "flight of the mind" and its expression through art:

it is motivated by a growing mistrust of the conventions of nineteenth-century realism and by a desire to seek out techniques appropriate to one of the central quests of literary modernism: the ever more accurate representation of psychological states and processes.

---

11 Thomas Harrison, op.cit., p. 15-16.
12 ibid.
14 Eric Prieto, Listening In, Music, Mind and the Modernist Narrative, op.cit., p. x.
Unlike Harrison, Eric Prieto sees the turn towards music as a positive development which fuelled the renewal and growth of Modernist literature:

If these [avant-garde and Modernist] writers appealed so often to music (as well as the other arts) to explain and defend their work, it is precisely because they were engaged in a struggle to question the accepted literary conventions of their era and propose new ones. [...] It is during periods of stylistic flux and innovation that we find the highest concentration of appeals to the other arts. From the Pleiade poets, to E.T.A. Hoffmann, to the Symbolist poets, to the generation of Joyce, Mann, Marcel Proust, and Virginia Woolf, to such postmodern writers as Anthony Burgess, Thomas Bernhard, and Pascal Quignard, music has provided a way to think about the means and ends of literature in a way that relativizes functions of literature that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or seemed unassailably established.15

Rather than relinquishing what Woolf will describe as their “old tools” altogether, i.e. words (E1:288), and thus being effectively wordless, modernist writers will try to find an alternative way to express what their own articulate and referential language failed to grasp by turning their attention towards music: they understood it as being a non-referential and non-verbal form of artistic expression, and one whose expressive ambivalence made it the perfect mode of expression of the mysterious essence of life understood in terms of mind and consciousness.

(ii) Water, music and the stream of consciousness in ‘The String Quartet’

In Woolf’s short story, ‘The String Quartet’, the three features of the story – the music, the river and the stream of consciousness – are all closely interdependent. The dream-sequences are not only instances of a musicalization of fiction, but are in themselves instances of (musically inspired) “stream of consciousness”. The image of running water, often associated with music as we highlighted above, is in itself contained within the metaphor of the “stream” of consciousness and serves in the story as a link between music and mind. Neither the music nor the mind is thus seen

to be a metaphor of one another (that is the role of the water) but perceived by Woolf to share some fundamental characteristics. Indeed, in a sort of concatenation of metaphors, the narrator's stream of consciousness dream-sequences thus themselves highlight the musical nature of the consciousness by playing on the metaphor of the "stream" of consciousness through the bias of an ambivalent recourse to the image of flowing water taken as both an analogy for the stream of consciousness and an analogy for musical expression. As we shall now see, by redefining the stream of consciousness in terms of music, Virginia Woolf is in fact highlighting the modalities of a "musical" understanding of the consciousness which would enable her to capture in her story the consciousness itself.

In 'A Sketch of the Past', even though Virginia Woolf will first use a spatial metaphor, to describe her childhood, "a great hall I could liken it to; with windows letting in strange lights; and murmurs and spaces of deep silence" (MB, 79), she will also find that "somehow, into that picture must be brought, too, the sense of movement and change":

Nothing remained stable long. One must get the feeling of everything approaching and then disappearing, getting large, getting small, passing at different rates of speed past the little creature; one must get the feeling that made her press on, the little creature driven on as she was by growth of her legs and arms, driven without her being able to stop it, or to change it, driven as a plant is driven up out of the earth, up until the stalk grows, the leaf grows, buds swell. That is what is indescribable, that is what makes all images too static, for no sooner has one said this was so, than it was past and altered. (MB, 79)

16 A metaphor which echoes Henry James's spatial understanding of consciousness: Henry James will speak, on the other hand, of our experiences forming a spider's web within the "chambers of consciousness" (see also Shirley Rose, 'The Unmoving Center: Consciousness in Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage', in Contemporary Literature, Vol. 10, No. 3, Summer, 1969, pp. 366-368), sending waves of reverberation through the many threads which connect all our experiences together: Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chambers of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in the tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative - much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius - it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (Henry James, The Art of Fiction, online at: http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no1/james.html) See Appendix 6 for an overview of the significance of the metaphors used in relation to the "stream of consciousness".
In the words of Miriam, the heroine of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, the “becoming” is at odds with the “being”:

Being versus becoming. Becoming versus being. Look after the being and the becoming will look after itself. Look after the becoming and the being will look after itself? Not so certain. Therefore it is certain that becoming depends upon being.17

In the case of Virginia Woolf however, the being is in constant becoming and in this way, there is no real dichotomy between the being and the becoming, no unbridgeable gap between the temporal and the atemporal. The mistake is to think the being itself in terms of linear sequence, i.e. on a vertical plane but a line nevertheless, when in fact, the being could be described as a layering of simultaneous, connected elements. For Virginia Woolf, the being is vertical, but it is a multilayered vertical texture which is constantly undergoing a continuous temporal horizontal change. Neither the metaphor of the stream nor of the halo express this characteristic of the consciousness with any satisfaction.

Virginia Woolf clearly saw the parallels between musical expression and her own modes of experience, to such an extent that she wished she had been a composer, as the composer’s art and material gives him/her the means to express and voice the complex layering of the “shades of being”, which literature, and specifically prose, were struggling to express satisfactorily. In a letter to the young poet Stephen Spender concerning the relative merits of poetry versus prose as a means of artistic expression, she discusses the merits of a musical conception of prose, which, in its present state is as yet “half fledged” but, if it looks to music, may have a future:

Yes, of course I agree that poetry makes statements; and perhaps the most important; but aren't there some shades of being that it can't state? And aren't these just as valuable, or whatever the term is, as any other? [...] Then I go on to say that prose, as written, is only half fledged; and has a future, and should grow [...]. It's all very complex and immensely interesting. I should like to write four lines at a time, [...] as a musician does; because it always seems to me that things are going on at so many different levels simultaneously. (L5: 315)

As it is clearly impossible for a writer to literally write, as a composer may, “four lines at a time”, Woolf sought alternative literary ways of expressing the complexity and simultaneity of events through her *mise en abyme* of the different focal levels. As she once stated after seeing a performance of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*:

An idea about Shakespeare.

That the play demands coming to the surface - hence insists upon a reality wh. the novel need not have, but perhaps should have. Contact with the surface, coming to the top. This is working out my theory of the different levels in writing, & how to combine them: for I begin to think the combination necessary. This particular relation with the surface is imposed on the dramatist of necessity: how far did it influence Shakespeare? Idea that one cd work out a theory of fiction &c. on these lines: how many levels attempted. whether kept to or not. *(D4:207)*

Music is thus seen by Woolf to embody the multidimensional features of the process of the mind and is thus central to Woolf’s understanding of the consciousness. From the purely literary point of view, this multilayered consciousness is difficult to capture. In prose, the static aspect of the consciousness is easy enough to express in images and scenes. It is the fluidity, the energy and dynamics of the constant transformation of these images and scenes which “is what is indescribable” *(MB, 79)*, because if one turns to “images” in themselves, they are too “static” *(MB, 79)* and fail to express this dynamic multilayered transformation, William James reinterprets the

18 The same idea was articulated by T.S. Eliot, who was clearly sensitive to this aspect of literary expression, which manifests itself in the different layers of consciousness which the audience may attain as these layers are suggested to them through the layering of the text:

In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding, a meaning which reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-but as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness. *(in T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry*, quoted in F.O. Mathiessen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* - *An Essay on the Nature of Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 41)*

19 In her diary, Woolf writes one day of a meeting with Eddy Sackville-West and the difficulty she had in trying to capture something of his being, asking, “why aren’t I left holding a small round substance, say of the size of a pea, in my hand; something I can put in a box & look at? There is so little left” *(D3: 188)*. In this diary entry, she records the impressions she was receiving while she was talking to him and significantly describes her consciousness of the whole scene in terms of several parallel levels of thoughts and perceptions:

I was thinking a thousand other thoughts; his presence was only I suppose a light on the surface of my mind – something green or iron-coloured or grey – while the water itself rushed on, in its old fierce way – thoughts about my writing; & about old age; & about buying the field (we bought it this morning) & about the children being noisy; & if I had bought Southease. All this went on sub-cutaneously. Yet his presence
notion of "image" with precisely the same analogy that Woolf used to describe consciousness, that of a "halo" of interconnected, associated images which form a network in our mind, giving the example of those unverbalized thoughts which up to then in "traditional psychology" had been dismissed (by Hume and Berkeley in particular) because it was thought that our minds functioned only with definite things and qualities, rather than the relations between thoughts, whereas "a good third of our psychic life" consists for James "in these rapid premonitory perspective views of schemes of thought not yet articulate". Indeed, language has the tendency to fix things rather than to express the process itself, "so inveterate has our habit become of recognizing the existence of the substantive parts alone, that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use". It is in the nature of the "substantive" states of mind to be static, in the same way as a snowflake caught in one's hand transforms itself into a drop of water. But how to express the snowflake before it becomes a drop of water? James will describe the functions of the brain through the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, constantly in motion, rearranging itself in patterns of consciousness:

We believe the brain to be an organ whose internal equilibrium is always in a state of change -- the change affecting every part. The pulses of change are doubtless more violent in one place than in another, their rhythm more rapid at this time that at that. As in a kaleidoscope revolving at a uniform rate, although the figures are always rearranging themselves, there are instants during which the transformation seems minute and interstitial and almost absent, followed by others when it shoots with magical rapidity, relatively stable forms thus alternating with forms we should not distinguish if seen again; so in the brain the perpetual rearrangement must result in some forms of tension lingering relatively long, whilst others simply come and pass.

\[\text{... somehow checked the flow of sub-cutaneous life. [...] My own thoughts could not flow deep or rapid, as they are doing now that Eddy is on his way to Tunbridge Wells. And what remains of Eddy is now in some ways more vivid, though more transparent, all of him composing itself in my mind, all I could get of him, & making itself a landscape appropriate to it; making a work of art for itself. (D3: 188-189)}\]

21 *ibid.*, p. 148.
22 *ibid.*, p. 147: "As a snowflake caught in the warm hand is no longer a flake but a drop, so, instead of catching the feeling of relation moving to its term, we find we have caught some substantive thing, usually the last word we were pronouncing, statically taken, and with its function, tendency, and particular meaning in the sentence quite evaporated."
23 *ibid.*, p. 148-149.
In such a way, if, on the one hand, images cannot describe motion because they show something fixed in time, forever unchanging, for, "no sooner has one said this was so, than it was past and altered" (MB, 79) since, for Virginia Woolf, an image of a static consciousness would not capture the motion of "being", on the other hand, the metaphor of the "stream" of consciousness on its own is itself reductionist and simplistic since, as a metaphor, it only expresses the shifting linear nature of being. It is therefore by turning to music that Virginia Woolf will discover a satisfactory model of the expression of both the spatial and the temporal manifestation of consciousness and being, i.e. the vertical textures of simultaneous and connected elements (the chords and harmony) progressing within a temporal horizontal framework. This was most clearly expressed in Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, in which she will clearly link the polyphonic nature of the music to an expression of the "mind's immeasurable profundity":

> The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking. (BA, 220)

Because music embodies both the fluid and the static, the horizontal and the vertical, it is precisely by looking at the consciousness within a musical context in "The String Quartet" that Woolf sows the seeds for an innovative stylistic approach to prose, which she will put into practise most successfully in her later novels, as we shall see below in Chapters 4 and 5.

(iii) The first dream-sequence

- From the fish-laden river...

There are indeed two apparently contradictory aspects of the musicalization of fiction in "The String Quartet": on the one hand, we have what appears to be a highly problematical and controversial fictionalization of music, and on the other hand, there
are signs of a subtle exploration of the musicalization of fiction. By first looking at how the first dream-sequence may legitimately be taken as an instance of the fictionalization of music, we shall endeavour to go beyond what is in fact only the uppermost level of the narrator’s response, to reveal in which way the ‘String Quartet’ is actually an original and noteworthy instance of a musicalization of fiction. We shall first proceed to decode the text in terms of music – what does the text tell us as to the music heard by the narrator. From there, we shall investigate from a musicological point of view the type of response dramatized, finally, we shall see how Virginia Woolf is in fact using music to redefine the boundaries of literary expression as exemplified in each dream-sequence. What would a reading of the narrator’s first dream-sequence in parallel with an analysis of music by Mozart and Schubert possibly reveal about the narrator’s first experience of the music? For the sake of clarity and argument, if we were to play the game of musical make-believe, as Kendall Walton would have it, and as the quartet in the text is in any case unspecified, nothing prevents us, for the sake of argument, from taking as musical example one of Mozart’s most well-known pieces, his serenade for strings No. 13 in G Major, K 525, otherwise known as ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’, which bears some striking resemblances to what we may make out of the music played in Virginia Woolf’s short story. We shall thus draw a few interesting parallels between its first movement and the narrator’s first dream-sequence, showing from which purely musical features of a Mozart quartet the fish-narrative could be derived and leading us to question to what extent these parallels may be significant in relation to the interaction between music and literature.

The first dream-sequence, taken as a purely literary text, cannot be considered as a story as such as it is the atmosphere of the passage which is its most striking feature. Indeed, the effect of the opening words is to suggest a turmoil of relentless speed and energy, essentially expressed by the multiplicity of action verbs (“flourish”, “spring”, “bud”, “burst”, “jet”, “flow”, “race”, “sweep”, “wash”, “leap”, “splash”, “scrape”, “churn”, “rush”, “ascend”, “curl”):

Flourish, spring, bud, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches.

---

24 cf. on page 107.
and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy where – its difficult this – conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round – free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up... (SQ, 139)

The dynamics and texture of the music are furthermore suggested by the alliterations: the loud reverberant sound of the /b/ of “burgeon, burst!” and the /d/ (“drops descend”), the thick /s/, /ʃ/ and /l/ and /p/ (“leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins”), the clear whistling penetrating /s/ and /ɛks/ (“ascending in exquisite spirals”). As an instance of explicit verbal music, it is undeniable that this passage is quite successful as we are certainly led to associate with this text the musical qualities of an energetic piece with a fast tempo and forte dynamics, parallel musical phrases (cf. the recurrence of the image of the fish rushed along by the current) interspersed with moments of melodic and harmonic suspense, as if fragments of musical material were repeated like echoes at the end of the phrases (cf. “round and round, round and round”, “up and up”). In such a way, the combination of these purely literary, imaginative and sonorous characteristics outlined above may bring to mind the character of a first movement in a Mozartian style, itself typically characterized by a fast tempo, the symmetry of the musical phrases, parallelisms, the repetition of the figurations at the end of the phrases leading to imperfect cadences. If we were to look more closely therefore at the potential parallels we could draw between the first dream-sequence and Mozart’s ‘Eine kleine Nachtmusik’ (see Figure 4 below), the first point of contact occurs in the very first bar: the opening arpeggiated G major chord played by the first and second violin could only be achieved with an actual flourish of the bow, the sweeping motion of the bow having to travel at speed across the strings to play all the notes of the chord.
The subsequent anacrustic rhythmic repeated figurations of the second beat of the first bar and the first beat of the second bar, give the impression of an upbeat effect of a “springing” or “bursting” of sound as they lead on to the ascending arpeggio of the G major triad, reaching up to D.  

Fig. 4, ex. 1, bars 1-2

25 public domain score downloaded from www.sheetmusicarchive.net
26 “Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst!” is alternatively described by Werner Wolf (The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 153) as suggesting four majestuous opening chords but this interpretation fails to take into account the musical significance of the initial “flourish” and subsequent image of “springing”.
The first musical phrase (bars 1 to 4) is furthermore comprised of two moments, the ascending arpeggiated figuration followed by its descending (quasi) mirror image in a I-V harmonic progression (the tonic G affirmed at the start leading towards the instability of the seventh chord and the imperfect cadence on D):

Fig. 4, ex. 2, bars 1–4

At a stretch, the arpeggiated style of these bars could be seen to suggest the upward motion of jetting fountains followed by the descending motion of drops of water, as featured in the narrator's first dream-sequence. Indeed, the dynamic properties of flowing water give themselves readily to musical transpositions (and vice-versa), witness the fact that water (and by extension, waves, fountains and rivers) have often been the subject of much programme music.27 We cannot ignore the fact that Western music of the past 400 years or so consists to a certain extent, of culturally and conventionally determined musical symbolism which a knowledgeable audience may easily decrypt and it is very likely that Virginia Woolf is playing here upon these typical conventions.28 The next section (bars 5 to 10) with the quaver ostinato on the

27 Indeed, one of the most simple musical images or symbols, the analogy between the wave-like pattern of arpeggiated figurations and the motion of waves occurs in many Impressionist works, see below, the opening bars of Maurice Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau*:


See also the arpeggiated figurations in Ravel's "Une barque sur l'oceant" and "Ondine", Claude Debussy's "La Mer", "Reflets dans l'eau", "Poisson d'or", and also Franz Liszt's "Jeux d'Eau à la Villa d'Este", Mendelssohn's "Fingal's Cave" op. 26, Vaughan Williams' Symphony no. 1 'Sea Symphony', etc.

G major triad (cello, viola, second violin) could in a similar manner bring to mind the deep (as the bass note G is played on the cello in the lower register) and continuous rippling motion of running water by a simple auditory analogy with the sound of rushing waters:

Fig. 4, ex. 3, bars 7-8

Since the ostinato is held on one note, the effect is of a linear horizontal motion – potentially suggesting the imagery of a horizontally flowing river (the Rhone) rather than a cascading stream which is more typically associated with descending arpeggios. The upward melodic motion of bars 9 and 10, followed by a silence, prolonging a moment of harmonic and melodic suspense which is only resolved in bar 18. Again, the melodic progression of these bars could give the impression of “ascending in exquisite spirals into the air” (SQ, 139) and the parallel figurations of the repeated ornamentation of the innumerable “turns” could be metaphorically described as being “curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up...” (SQ, 139), the silence of the fourth beat of bar 10 having a similar effect as the three “dots” in the text:

Fig. 4, ex. 4, bars 9-10

The repetition of the musical phrase of bars 11-14 and 15-18 could suggest the images of eddying round and round, the music stuck, so to speak, in a groove, and then suddenly bursting forth in bar 18:
While the above analysis is surprisingly convincing - indeed we could nearly think that “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” was the quartet being playing in the short story even though drawing further parallelisms would be quite difficult -, it could also be justifiably argued that these characteristics could be found in a lot of different musical styles as well and such cross-readings could be made of many other movements from Mozart’s corpus of works and in fact, some of the comments could certainly be made of the first movement of Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet, D667 in A major, Virginia Woolf’s original source. Superficially, the ‘Trout’ and “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” do indeed have in common certain musical events which a comparison of the two reveal: in the ‘Trout’ (see Figure 5), the opening section of the first movement is marked by an A major chord played by the piano and strings, similarly arpeggiated on the viola and violin to the opening of the Mozart, followed by an ascending A major arpeggio on the piano.

29 see on page 85.
This is followed by a calm quasi-choral passage played by the strings, evocative yet again of the contrast between “flourish, spring, burgeon, burst”, the stately nature of the “pear tree” and the majesty of the mountain, punctuated by an octave A played in the lower register of the piano, echo of the opening chord. This section eventually leads to a lively section (bar 25 onwards), the theme played in alternation by the violin and the piano over a quaver ostinato on the viola and cello, evocative of the flowing waters of the Rhone (see Fig. 5, ex. 1).

30 score downloaded from http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/bhq1735/index.html
We could in fact continue *ad infinitum* to read many more musical works in parallel with Virginia Woolf's short story without much trouble, nor much justification for doing so. If we go beyond drawing such potentially controversial one-to-one analogies in a detailed but after all only quite fortuitously credible parallel reading of the narrator's first dream-sequence, Mozart's 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik' and, to a certain extent, Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet, our analysis does however reveal that some more fundamental melopoetic traits emerge. By moving beyond the concrete imagery of rivers and fish and trying to see how this imagery can actually correspond to abstract musical gestures, be they Mozart or Schubert, what is in fact revealed is a certain abstract objective notion of musical energy, motion and rhythm, which 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik' and the 'Trout' Quintet both share. These are general characteristics of music which Woolf has put under scrutiny in this first dream-sequence.

* ... to an expression of abstract musical motion*

The concrete images of the dream-sequence appear therefore to be merely superficial clothing, there to serve the expression of a more abstract essence of
musical expression. Many philosophers of music would agree with Hanslick, who famously stated in 1854 that “der Inhalt der Musik sind tönend bewegte Formen”\(^{31}\) or more metaphorically music is like an “arabesque” or a “kaleidoscope”.\(^{32}\) Similarly, according to Monroe Beardsley, music can express abstract processes and motions:

Music is at least a process and certain things can be said of all processes, including physical changes, whether locomotion (change of position) or qualitative change. All processes have such kinetic qualities as pace, tension, momentum, climax, crescendo, dying away. And one process, say a musical one, can be similar to another in its kinetic pattern. Thus music can undoubtedly imitate to some extent the kinetic aspects of physical motion: rushing, staggering, bounding, creeping, wavering, romping, driving, soaring, gliding, surging, flying, falling, blowing up and collapsing.\(^{33}\)

As Jeremy Siepmann will argue in his overview of Schubert’s ‘Trout’ Quintet, trouts conjure up an imaginative world whose features are in fact well suited to musical expression in general, and as such, pervade Schubert’s quintet as a whole, being more than simply a thematic borrowing for his set of variations:

Most of us have only seen trout on a plate, but if you’ve ever had the experience of looking into a stream, a brook, or a river, and seeing a trout in its natural habitat, you’ll know that it can ‘hover’, or whatever the aquatic equivalent of hovering is, motionless, as though in suspended animation, and that it can shoot off at high speed, trout and stream merging into a single blur for a moment, before the trout comes to a stop again, this time perhaps closer to the surface, the sun glinting off the coloured speckles on its back like light refracted through a prism. Well, it’s not until the fourth movement that Schubert gets round to the variations on his song, but, as it happens, the music in this first movement has a lot in common with the vision I’ve just conjured up.\(^{34}\)

\(^{31}\) this phrase has be variously translated, loosely, it means “the content of music is tonally moving forms”. For a discussion of the implications of the various translations of this phrase, see Geoffrey Payzant ‘Hanslick, Sams, Gay, and “Tönend Bewegte Formen”’, in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 40, No. 1., Autumn, 1981, pp. 41-48.


The most remarkable element in the imagery of the first dream-sequence is the constant tension between a certain sense of linearity and flow and the notion of circularity and suspense. The tension is heightened by moments of speed brought into suspense, coming to a halt, then suddenly rushing on again, the style and language mirroring in the narrative itself these changes of tempo. The initial poise and stature given by the succession of the opening verbs "flourish, spring, burgeon, burst", and leading to the images of the pear-tree and the mountain, gives way to the fast flowing waters of the river Rhone; the fish, rushed by the current under the arches, are then caught in the circular turmoil of an eddy – emphasized by the pause in the progression of the narrative created by the repetition “round and round, round and round”-, but suddenly break loose and are rushed again down in the stream, and yet again, find themselves spiralling up, suspended (quite implausibly) in the air like “shavings from a plane”, the final three dots (“...”) giving the effect of a lengthy pause evoking a musical fermata, before the final twist in the narrative, the description of the jolly fishwives laughing under the bridges. In the “eddy”, for instance, the intensity of the pace and tempo is actually maintained throughout by the images of leaping and jumping fish and pebbles being churned round and round, despite the expression of a suspension in the linear flow of the river. In such a way, rather than a suggested rubato\textsuperscript{35} of the actual tempo of the music, the narrator is in fact describing the melodic and harmonic rhythmic textures of the music itself, the tempo staying steady throughout. Music analyst Joseph Swain will argue that the perception of motion is one of the most prominent feature in our musical experience\textsuperscript{36} and what other images than those of running water and slithering trout could best convey musical motion, “the speed of harmonic change” in particular being that which “we are most aware of in the listening experience”?\textsuperscript{37} The suggested motion of the opening dream-sequence

\textsuperscript{35} see definition of “rubato” by Richard Hudson as “the expressive alteration of rhythm or tempo. In an earlier type the melody is altered while the accompaniment maintains strict time. A later type involves rhythmic flexibility of the entire musical substance. Both originated as a part of unnotated performing practice, but were later sometimes indicated in scores. Some modern writers refer to the earlier and later types as melodic and structural, borrowed and stolen, contrametric and agogic, or bound and free.” (‘rubato’, introduction), “The later type of rubato was described by Kalkbrenner in 1789. For Busby in 1801 rubato was ‘time alternately accelerated and retarded for the purpose of enforcing the expression’. Türk listed the later type of rubato in 1802 as one of the ‘extraordinary means’ by which ‘the expression may be improved’, but added that ‘one usually intends to indicate thereby only the hesitation or pausing (not the hastening)’.” ‘rubato’, §2, Grove Music Online, op.cit.


\textsuperscript{37} ibid., p 103.
is characteristic of the musical process of “harmonic rhythm”, defined by Joseph Swain as the “perception of rhythm that depends on changes in aspects of harmony”. Certain expressive musical effects are thus heightened by the change in the rhythm of the harmonic progression of the chords, thus creating a cross-texture of rhythms between the “surface” rhythms of a melodic phrase which do not affect the harmony as such and a deeper undertow of the rhythms of the harmonic changes. A good example of this may be found in Frédéric Chopin’s Etude op. 25, no. 1, which Swain looks at in detail:

Figure 6. Frédéric Chopin Etude op. 25 no. 1 in A flat major

The shimmer of the arpeggiated figurations create a vibrant rapid texture whereas the actual harmonic bass rhythm on an A flat remains static and constant. As Swain will argue,

the design is reflected in his notation in the large and small noteheads. It so happens in this etude that the most salient harmonic rhythms move much more slowly than the textural or phenomenal, which participate not at all in the principal rhythmic and harmonic gestures of the movement. Chopin uses this rapid arpeggiation as a sonic backdrop against which the main action will play out, much like a painter who begins

---

38 ibid., p 4.
39 Public domain edition, online: www.sheetmusicarchive.net.
the canvas with a colored wash that will surround all the figures to be put thereon without being a part of them.\textsuperscript{40}

The effect, as in Virginia Woolf's story, will be of a succession of eddies of sound, moments of suspension and lull, superseded by sudden bursts of free progressions.

Needless to say, harmonic rhythm chiefly functions within a harmonic or polyphonic texture: in 'The String Quartet', the texture of the scene described by the narrator is indeed extraordinarily complex. The effect of the ebb and flow dynamic of the whole is compounded by a complex spatialization, i.e. a vertical texture built up by the images themselves, several things going on at different levels at the same time, itself a constant tug-of-war between opposites. In 'The String Quartet', high is opposed to low:

- the mountain/the Rhone river in the valley
- the fountains jetting upwards/the drops descending
- the deep waters of the river/the shallow pools churning up the yellow pebbles from the bottom of the river
- the leaves washed over the surface of the water/the shadows they create over the fish in the depths
- the fish rushing downwards/the fish spiralling upwards into the air like shavings).

Linear is opposed to circular:

- the flow of the river/the circular maelstrom of the eddies and the pebbles churning round and round
- the fish rushing downwards/ascending in spirals.

And the images themselves are also characterized by the superposition of opposites:

- the roundness and fullness evoked by the pear tree bursting with burgeons and flowers contrasted with the sharpness of the pointed top of the mountain (the

\textsuperscript{40} Joseph Swain, \textit{op.cit.}, p 25.
high craggy summits of the Alps are vividly suggested by the mention of the river Rhone, whose spring is located in Switzerland)

- the jetting fountains opposed to the showers of descending (round) water drops
- the depth of the Rhone river opposed to the surface of the river strewn with floating leaves
- the linear flow of the water opposed to the round arches of the bridges
- the sharp fins of the silver and spotted fish churning up the yellow pebbles round and round in the circular pools and eddies
- and the ascending spirals contrasted with the “thin shavings from under a plane”.

The music therefore could thus legitimately be described by the narrator in ‘The String Quartet’ as going “round and round”, reflecting in fact the perception of a melodic fragment as it is repeated over a constant (suspensive) harmony, until that harmonic suspense is resolved or moves on, the flow and rhythms of the melody counterbalanced by the progression of the underlying harmony, giving an illusion (and it is only an illusion) of speeding up or slowing down, of a vertical suspension resolving into a sudden horizontal rush.

- **Towards a music of the music of the mind**

The constant tug of war in the music of ‘The String Quartet’, between the metaphorical linear flow of the river and these moments of “exquisite” vertical (circular) suspense which characterises the opening section of the first dream-sequence thus exemplifies a dichotomy which is mirrored in Virginia Woolf’s own ambivalent perception of life as a constant clash between fluidity and solidity, between the apparent temporal linear nature of life as a sequence of events, and those epiphanic “moments of being” characterized by a suspension in the linear flow, expressing moments of (metaphorically seen as both circular and vertical) revelation, time standing still (cf. *D3*: 218). Interestingly, in yet another approach to musical texture which draws upon certain characteristics of “harmonic rhythm” which we discussed above, Robert P. Morgan will describe the Modernist “revolution in musical
language" as a shift in the relationship between “compositional foreground and compositional background”. The “foreground”, he describes as the more or less complex textures of surface details, ornaments and embellishments which fill in the gaps between the vertical harmonic elements of the framework of the background structure. Giving examples of “consonance, diatonicism, triad, and fundamental progression”, the background is seen to follow the basic conventions of Western harmonic “language” since the Renaissance and therefore “represents what is essentially fixed and unchanging,” whereas the foreground, on the other hand “contains what is unique, individual, and characteristic in a composition”, for instance, the “dissonance, chromaticism, and auxiliary tones”.41 Both background and foreground are “mutually dependant” as “the underlying framework is often not sounded at all but must be deduced from the implications of the foreground, while the foreground though actually sounded, owes its ‘grammatical’ meaning solely to its connection with a ‘virtual background’.”42 For Robert P. Morgan, “the history of Western music theory” can therefore be understood as “an attempt to codify a set of rules for, on the one hand, approved background relationships and, on the other, permissible foreground changes”.43 The expression of the musical discourse of the opening section of the first dream-sequence of ‘The String Quartet’ would seem to strongly exemplify this tension between the complex surface flow of the metaphorical running river and the harmonic background progression, the moments of harmonic “suspense” manifesting themselves in the analogies of the vertical spirals. Virginia Woolf’s musicalized expression of the narrator’s consciousness would therefore seem to express both the surface “flight of the mind”, symbolized by the linear flowing waters of the river, and those moments of being, of revelation, which stand outside the linear flow of time and expand vertically in watery and aerial eddies.

Because the sound world of music is understood to be free from the all-pervading notion of geometric space, all too easily representative, whilst at the same time suggesting the constant metamorphosis in time of simultaneous (sound) events within a complex, multi-layered design, music cannot not fall into the linguistic trap of describing the consciousness, but is actually perceived to be an instance of, or at

42 ibid., p. 451.
43 ibid.
least the direct expression of the processes of the mind, thus providing an “image” in sound of a Bergsonian “durée pure” (pure duration) which itself is defined in terms of states of mind made up of a simultaneous layering of multiple elements, thus revealing the actual process of consciousness, totally abstracted from its content and which Bergson himself compared to a musical process:

There are indeed two possible conceptions of durations, one pure of all mixture, the other which is unwittingly pervaded by the notion of space. The pure duration is the shape taken by our successive states of mind when the self lets itself live, when it avoids making a separation between the present state and the past states. The self does not need, for this, to absorb itself in its entirety in the sensation or the idea which passes, because in that case, on the contrary, it would cease to last. The self doesn’t have either to forget its past states: it is sufficient that by remembering these states, it doesn’t juxtapose them to the present state as if to another point, but to organize with it, like it happens when we remember, melted together like the notes of a melody. Wouldn’t it be possible to say that if these notes succeed each other, we would still perceive them fused together, and their whole would be comparable to a living being whose parts, even though distinct from one another, are fused together by their solidarity. The proof is that if we break the measure by insisting too much on one of the notes of the melodic line, it is not its exaggerated length, as length, which will tell us of our error but the qualitative change brought to the whole of the musical phrase. We can therefore conceive succession without distinction, and like a mutual fusion of the whole, a solidarity, an intimate organisation of part in which each is representative of the whole and can only distinguish itself and isolate itself from the rest for a mind capable of abstraction. This is without doubt the conception which someone would

---

44 the word “image” here is taken in its sense of “mental representation” or “conception”. Unfortunately the word “image” can be quite problematical as it has too many spatial connotations which the musical analogy is precisely meant to transcend; cf. Bergson’s definition of pure duration in terms of an a-spatial musical process:

“Que si enfin je conserve, joint à l'image de l'oscillation présente, le souvenir de l'oscillation qui la précédait, il arrivera de deux choses l'une : ou je juxtaposerai les deux images, et nous retombons alors sur notre première hypothèse; ou je les apercevrai l'une dans l'autre, se pénétrant et s'organisant entre elles comme les notes d'une mélodie, de manière à former ce que nous appellerons une multiplicité indistincte ou qualitative, sans aucune ressemblance avec le nombre : j'obtiendrai ainsi l'image de la durée pure, mais aussi je me serai entièrement dégagé de l'idée d'un milieu homogène ou d'une quantité mesurable.” (“If I conserve, jointly with the image of the present oscillation, the memory of the oscillation which preceded it, two things will occur: either I will juxtapose both images and we fall back on our first hypothesis, or I shall see them one within the other, penetrating each other and organizing themselves together like the notes of a melody, in a way to form what we shall call an indistinct or qualitative multiplicity, without any resemblance to number; I would obtain thus the image of pure duration, but I would also be totally free of the notion of a homogeneous space or a measurable quantity” (my translation)) Bergson, Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience, Chapter II, p. 50 (online text: http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/essai_conscience_immédiat/essai_conscience.pdf)
make of duration at the same time identical and changing, who would have no notion of space.45

By thus defining “pure duration” by the consciousness itself (and *vice versa*, consciousness thus becomes “pure duration”), music becomes an integral part of the equation, central to our understanding of the stream of consciousness, as it is in itself an analogy for this correlation of time and ever changing states of consciousness. Not only an “image” of the “*durée pure*”, music thus also becomes the “image” of a *conscience pure*, consciousness itself. But even the similarity of music with psychological processes is not straightforward as critics cannot agree as to what “psychological processes” are actually denoted by the music: “we cannot decide among the innumerable possible qualities, so that if the music is a sign at all, it is ambiguous.”46 Kivy, in a similar reasoning, will end up asking the same question in a chapter entitled ‘The Profundity of Music’ in his study of absolute music, *Music Alone*: “The problem is that we – at least *I* – have no clear idea at all about why serious well-educated, adult human beings should find pure musical sound of such abiding interest that we are moved to call the subject ‘profound’”.47 Monroe Beardsley, on the other hand, will conclude with a “negative” view, that music can neither *express* anything nor *signify* anything, that it has no reference to anything - a theory often assimilated with the “Formalist Theory”, a name however, which he disowns at he finds it is “misleading”.48 For him,

45 my translation of the original text in French:
“Il y a en effet [...] deux conceptions possibles de la durée, l'une pure de tout mélange, l'autre où interviennent subrepticement l'idée d'espace. La durée toute pure est la forme que prend la succession de nos états de conscience quand notre moi se laisse vivre, quand il s'abstient d'établir une séparation entre l'état présent et les états antérieurs. Il n'a pas besoin, pour cela, de s'absorber tout entier dans la sensation ou l'idée qui passe, car alors, au contraire, il cesserait de durer. Il n'a pas besoin non plus d'oublier les états antérieurs : il suffit qu'en se rappelant ces états il ne les juxtapose pas à l'état actuel comme un point à un autre point, mais les organise avec lui, comme il arrive quand nous nous rappelons, fondées pour ainsi dire ensemble, les notes d'une mélodie. Ne pourrait-on pas dire que, si ces notes se succèdent, nous les apercevons néanmoins les unes dans les autres, et que leur ensemble est comparable à un être vivant, dont les parties, quoique distinctes, se pénètrent par l'effet même de leur solidarité ? La preuve en est que si nous rompons la mesure en insistant plus que de raison sur une note de la mélodie, ce n'est pas sa longueur exagérée, en tant que longueur, qui nous avertira de notre faute, mais le changement qualitatif apporté par là à l'ensemble de la phrase musicale. On peut donc concevoir la succession sans la distinction, et comme une pénétration mutuelle, une solidarité, une organisation intime d'éléments, dont chacun représentatif du tout, ne s'en distingue et ne s'en isole que pour une pensée capable d'abstraire. Telle est sans aucun doute la représentation que se ferait de la durée un être à la fois identique et changeant, qui n'aurait aucune idée de l'espace.” Bergson, *Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience*, op.cit., p. 48-49

48 see Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, op.cit., p. 338:
music, then, is no symbol of time or process, mental or physical, Newtonian, or Bergsonian; it is process. And perhaps we can say it is the closest thing to pure process, to happening as such, to change abstracted from anything that changes, so that it is something whose course and destiny we can follow with the most exact and scrupulous and concentric attention, undistracted by reflections of our normal joys or woes, or by clues and implications for our safety or success. Instead of saying that music can be no more than this, we ought to say that music can be all of this, as nothing else can be.  

Beardsley is aware that his conclusion is not entirely satisfactory as it fails to resolve the discrepancy which he perceives exists between music as process – expressing or signifying neither emotions nor ideas – and music as being “valuable”, i.e. music as meaningful: “How this [music as process] makes music valuable, and what value it has, we are to ask later”.  

Laird Addis will however point out a most significant aspect of the question: there can indeed be drawn a parallel between the processes of “pure” consciousness, that is, consciousness devoid of its “content” (i.e. “consciousness” as opposed to the consciousness “of” something), and absolute music, that is, music which is also devoid of “content” if one makes the distinction between “states of consciousness” (consciousness of) and consciousness (as process) itself. This is fundamental to why Virginia Woolf will give so much value to an understanding of the consciousness in terms of music. As Addis argues,

consciousness, Husserl and Sartre were wont to say, is always consciousness of something, although not necessarily of “something” that exists. This is so much the case that when one tries to specify the character of any particular state of consciousness – be it a perception or a remembering or a desiring or a contemplating or an imagining or whatever – one can, apart from mention of its “formal” characteristics as an event (such as those of duration and intensity), only describe what that consciousness was about. To describe one’s perceptions of a parade is to describe the parade – as we perceived, to be sure, but even so the parade is not any perception of it. Thus, to put the point

The view of music that we have now arrived at is often called the “Formalist” theory of music. But since, in this context, it is entirely negative – because it consists in the denial of the proposition that music has a meaning – it hardly deserves a special name; and since it is reasonable, it does not deserve a misleading one.

49 ibid., p. 338-339.
50 ibid., p. 339.
paradoxically, to describe a state of consciousness is to describe something other than the state of consciousness, that which the consciousness is a consciousness of. ⁵¹

The question remains however as to how the process of consciousness actually functions as abstract pure process without reducing it to a mechanistic procedure. The problem lies in the paradox that to be abstract is always to be abstract from or of something, as shown in the Latin origins of the word “abstractus” signifying “to be drawn away”. ⁵² If music is abstraction *par excellence*, the ever-recurring question is what is it abstraction of and can it be a token of pure abstraction? Abstraction *per se*. Is this not a contradiction in terms? Hence music is either perceived as abstraction of the world (in such a way, music, for all its abstract nature, would still be representational since whether it is considered as formal or as process, it is still related to concrete spatial qualities) or, like Kivy, music is abstraction from the world into a world of “pure” abstraction, abstraction in itself to be enjoyed in itself for itself. He does not see it as an abstraction of this world, but rather as a parallel world in itself, made out of pure sonic matter, in the same way as the narrator of the String Quartet moves from the highly representational river-scenes of the first dream-sequences to a world without people or “reality” as we know it. Yet again, we return to the question as to what extent is this pure abstraction of any value? What is interesting in Kivy’s interpretation of musical meaning is that he sees the value of music’s abstract nature not in the music itself but in our apprehension of the abstraction in a type of transcendence, i.e. the “sense of liberation” which it provides us with. So doing he is not describing music itself as a *process* of abstraction away from a concrete world as the music *is* pure abstraction. Of value then, is the musical *experience* which embodies the process towards abstraction. Kivy, in his more recent reflections, will first attempt to redeem the value of the “decorative” back into the “Pantheon” of the fine arts – finding in music’s formal qualities purely “decorative” features:

*music [...] is “merely” sonic wallpaper, but it is wallpaper with some pretty impressive features. It is multidimensional wallpaper. It is quasi-syntactical wallpaper. It is deeply expressive wallpaper. And it is deeply moving wallpaper. These features, I urge, help*

---

⁵² *OED* online, entry for ‘abstract’.
redeem music from the charge that as a decorative art, it is somehow demoted to the status of the trivial.53

More recently though, he will go a step further but at the same time return to more Romantic notions of musical transcendence and find the value of absolute music in the way that music "liberates" us from our concrete material world to a world of purely formal and aesthetic structures:

listening to absolute music is, among other things, the experience of going from our world, with all of its trials, tribulations, and ambiguities, to another world, a world of pure sonic structure, that, because it need not be interpreted as a representation or description of our world, but can be appreciated on its own terms alone, gives us the sense of liberation that I have found appropriate to analogize with the pleasurable experience we get in the process of going from a state of intense pain to its cessation.54

The listening experience is thus situated between the dialectical opposites of the real concrete "world" and the abstract aesthetic "world" of music. Therein lies, for Kivy, the notion of music as pure process. Interestingly, Kivy's most recent philosophical approach to the problem of musical meaning is in fact a return to the early Post-Impressionist stances on abstraction in art: as Roger Fry had said, the originality of the Post-Impressionists, Cézanne's style in particular, was to subsume representation to abstract formal qualities without however actually abandoning representation altogether.55

Virginia Woolf thus takes music as the process of the mind itself, one in which the representative features are subsumed beneath the abstract features they imply, in a bid to capture the consciousness itself. Because all the narrator's responses to music are an expression of her stream of consciousness, the first dream-sequence thus sets the scene for Woolf's approach to the relation between music and mind in the subsequent dream-sequences.

55 cf. Roger Fry, "Introductory Note to Maurice Denis, 'Cezanne'*, *op.cit.* p. 76.
b. Regaining the vitality of a Modernist expression of emotions through music

If music is seen to be the answer to the problem of the literary representation of the stream of consciousness in literature by going beyond representation as such and bringing to life the actual processes of the mind, it plays an even more fundamental role in the Modernist conception of the expressive impact of literary works in terms of the emotional life of the mind. In her exploration of the relation between mind and music in ‘The String Quartet’, Virginia Woolf goes one step further in the second dream-sequence and scrutinizes the common-place notion that music is often seen to be a model for the expression of a world of languorous emotion, nostalgia, memory and individuality. But as we shall see, Woolf will go beyond the more superficial sentimental aspects of the story’s focus on musical emotion to reveal how she is in fact relying on the musical model to give to Modernist prose a vitality and expressive power she felt it had lost.

(i) The evocative music of a Romantic sensibility: the second dream-sequence of ‘The String Quartet’

In the second dream-sequence, cross-references to Romantic poetic imagery abound and serve to accentuate the melancholy atmosphere of the dream. The sorrow, pain and grief expressed by the narrator at this point are thus intensified by the underlying poetic connotations conveyed by a cluster of typically Romantic images: a moonlit boat-trip, the trailing boughs of the weeping willows growing along the banks of the river, the song of an invisible bird, the all-pervading sadness of a lost love, and a fresh grave strewn with rose-leaves. Even though we know from the original version that the narrator describes this passage as “a slow movement by Mozart” (cf. SF, 301, ft.2 to ‘The String Quartet’), the interpretation of this dream-sequence as it stands in the final version (without any reference to Mozart) only fully makes sense if we understand it as being underpinned by a slower, more quiet musical movement in a minor key, the character of which is suggested in particular by the melancholy tone of the passage, the hushed and dark atmosphere and the slow motion of the flow of the
river (the willow-boughs are "trailing" in the current), and syntactically, by the long, convoluted phrases (in particular compared to the short rapid pace of the style of the first dream) and many three, four or even five syllable words ("inextricably", "commingled", "compassion", "tenderness", "consummation", "invisible"). Many of the images are themselves indirectly linked back to music as well as being staple symbols of poetic and literary creation.

All in all, the second dream-sequence is certainly reminiscent of much Romantic poetry. A certain number of key poems spring to mind, notably those of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats and lines such as these from Coleridge's "The Nightingale" – feature a stream, a night sky, a nightingale, music, joy and melancholy, as in Woolf's text:

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day  
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip  
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.  
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!  
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,  
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently.  
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still.  
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,  
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers  
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find  
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.  
And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,  
'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!  
A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!  
In Nature there is nothing melancholy.  
But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced  
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,  
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,  
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,  
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale  
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain. 56

The willow is also a feature of many Romantic poems, and its drooping shape makes it a popular symbol of sorrow and nostalgia, its branches trailing in the slow currents evocative of sadness.57 It is while steering his boat along the waters of a meandering stream, in the moonlight, past whispering willows, that Keats will wistfully remember the beauty of Endymion and so begin his story:

so I will begin
Now while I cannot hear the city's din;
Now while the early budders are just new,
And run in mazes of the youngest hue
About old forests; while the willow trails
Its delicate amber; and the dairy pails
Bring home increase of milk. And, as the year
Grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer
My little boat, for many quiet hours,
With streams that deepen freshly into bowers.58

The willow is also often associated with music as the sound of the wind in its branches is seen to suggest a mysterious, sometimes supernatural singing or whispering,59 a feature of the narrator's dream ("what are you whispering?"). The willow does not only possess Romantic connotations, but it is also associated with the Ancient Greek myth of Orpheus (see Figure 7 below),60 a legend referred to again

57 see entry on "willow" in Michael Ferber, Dictionary of Literary Symbol, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 234-235. The Willow is also dedicated to the moon in pagan beliefs as well as being a symbol of grief and of water.
59 cf. Keat, Endymion, Book I, op.cit., l. 26-31:
   even as the trees
   That whisper round a temple become soon
   Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
   The passion posy, glories infinite,
   Haunt us till they become a cheering light
   Unto our souls
60 Derived from Greek mythology, the poet and musician Orpheus is often depicted holding willow leaves and leaning against willow trees as it is from this tree that he acquired his supernatural "gift of eloquence" and musicianship with which he charmed animals and plants, rocks and rivers and with which he also charmed Hades and Persephone in the Underworld to bring back Eurydice. See also C.
later on in this dream as the narrator will speak of the “sunless world” below the surface of the water in which she was plunged after the sinking of the boat, and which forms the backdrop of the central passage of this dream, and like Eurydice on hearing the sound of Orpheus’s music, the narrator’s icy underworld “thaws” and is “flooded” with “love”. Just as Coleridge’s “night-wandering man” hears his own sorrow spoken back to him in “all gentle sounds” of nature, the narrator in a similar show of ‘pathetic fallacy’, sees the lost love’s face in the face of the moon, hears the lost love’s voice in the song of the nightingale and whispering rustling of the willows:

When the moon comes through the trailing willow boughs, I see your face, I hear your voice and the bird singing as we pass the osier bed. What are you whispering? (SQ, 140)

M. Bowra, ‘Orpheus and Eurydice’, The Classical Quarterly, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 3, July-October 1952, pp. 113-126, (cf. Carlos Parada, ‘Orpheus’, Greek Mythology Link, online: http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Orpheus.html). The lyre, made out of Willow wood, which had been given to him by Apollo, was placed amongst the constellations by the Muses after his death, and nightingales sing over one of his graves in Leibethra (Thrace).

61 cf. original version, “together we’ve been under”, SF, 301. In Keat’s Endymion, Endymion will also go into the underworld in search for the Goddess of the Moon, named Cynthia in Keat’s poem, with whom he fell in love during a “dream”.

62 Mosaic held at the Shahba Museum, Syria, online: http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/Z49.2.html.

63 an expression coined by John Ruskin in 1856, see below on page 167.
Often appearing in the same poetic context as willows and rivers, even though it remains unnamed in ‘The String Quartet’, the invisible singing nocturnal bird is most certainly a nightingale, a bird which has strong associations with poetry, music and dreams, mourning, lost love, and melancholy, but also transcendence, purity and unattainable (therefore heartbreaking) happiness, in particular in Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ which Virginia Woolf may well have had in mind when writing this passage:

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

The third section of this dream-sequence conjures up the image of a shower of “rose leaves” slowly fluttering to the ground to form a “coverlet” over a fresh grave. Rose leaves, unsurprisingly, are also typical of Romantic imagery associated with death and love, melancholy, nostalgia and music, which Shelley in particular was to express so evocatively. Just as the last rose leaf in ‘The String Quartet’, will not “reach us”, fluttering in the wind and failing to settle onto the grave, thus giving no repose to the

65 see Wordsworth, “Ode to a Nightingale”:
O nightingale! thou surely art
A creature of a "fiery heart":--
These notes of thine--they pierce and pierce;
Tumultuous harmony and fierce!
Thou sing'st as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine;
A song in mockery and despite
Of shades, and dews, and silent night;
And steady bliss, and all the loves
Now sleeping in these peaceful groves. [...]
see also Keats 'Ode to a Nightingale', online at http://www.bartleby.com/101/624.html: "light-winged Dryad of the trees” (l. 7), "immortal Bird" (l. 61) – as in Coleridge’s poem, the nightingale is here also associated with a meandering “stream”.
66 Virginia Woolf has said upon one occasion that she would gladly become Keats's “canary” in order to “share his society” (cf. ‘David Copperfield’, E4: 289, ft. 10).
67 John Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, op.cit., l. 75-79.

154
narrator’s grief, Shelley will never find solace, because music, odours and sights will constantly reawaken the memory of his lost love:

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap’d for the beloved’s bed;
And so thy thoughts, when Thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.68

Paradoxically, in this dream-sequence, music is, on first view, made to express a highly emotional atmosphere more typical of sentimentality and Romanticism than Modernism.

(ii) The paradise lost of literary emotion

Before we address the question of the role of music proper in the representation of the Modernist emotions as exemplified in the second dream-sequence, we must first of all pause an instant to investigate the purely literary implications of the Romantic imagery of the second dream-sequence in Virginia Woolf’s aesthetics of prose by focusing in particular on the image of the “rose-leaf” within its wider Modernist literary context.

We do not know if T.S. Eliot had Virginia Woolf’s ‘The String Quartet’ in mind, a story which as we have seen, he had greatly admired, but he was also to use the metaphor of “rose leaves” within the context and atmosphere of sorrow and nostalgia in his 1935 poem ‘Burnt Norton’, the first of his “Four Quartets”, in a passage somewhat similar in tone to that of Virginia Woolf:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take

Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.69

It is not surprising if the mention of rose leaves, an image which recurs throughout
The Four Quartets, can be interpreted in T.S. Eliot’s poem as a metaphor for poetic
creation. Indeed, in ‘Little Gidding’, the rose leaves become themselves a metaphor
for words and the writer, having disturbed the bowl in which they are kept by writing
a story, leaves a cloud of dust suspended in the air:

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.70

The image of “rose leaves” points to an imaginative framework based on the poetry of
the past, thus becoming the (dusty) symbols of a lost (poetic) paradise.71 The recourse
to Romantic imagery in the second dream-sequence, imagery which is associated in
‘The String Quartet’ with these symbolic rose leaves, can therefore be read as a
reflection on the expressive powers of the poetry of the past. Indeed, Virginia Woolf

Faber, 2004, p.171, lines 11-18.
71 The same analogy between rose-leaves and poetic creation occurs in Oliver Wendell Holme’s
‘Poem’, in which the old rose-leaves gathered on the poet’s grave will symbolize the immortality of the
poet’s works as the wind picks them up and blows them round the world.

Count not our Poet dead!
[...]
He sleeps; he cannot die!
As evening's long-drawn sigh,
Lifting the rose-leaves on his peaceful mound,
Spreads all their sweets around,
So, laden with his song, the breezes blow
From where the rustling sedge
Frets our rude ocean's edge
To the smooth sea beyond the peaks of snow.
His soul the air enshrines and leaves but dust below!

Oliver Wendell Holmes, ‘Poem, at the Dedication of the Halleck Monument’ (July 1869), in Poems, a
Volume Printed in Raised Letters for the Blind, online:
will admire the sincerity and untarnished poetical expression of the Greek poets, Sophocles in particular, who could use the then untarnished images of nightingales and the powerful myth of Orpheus to create lasting impressions and vivid emotions in her audience. Today, these images can only conjure up sentimental scenes of inferior expressive value as the opening of the second dream-sequence exemplifies, as Woolf will argue in her essay ‘On not knowing Greek’:

here we meet them before their emotions have been worn into uniformity. Here we listen to the nightingale whose song echoes through English literature singing in her own Greek tongue. For the first time Orpheus with his lute makes men and beasts follow him. Their voices ring out clear and sharp. (E4:42)

Both Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot were concerned about language’s unavoidable cultural and aesthetic baggage, wondering how to turn this to their advantage and how to create afresh with these “old” words. Speaking about reading Sophocles, Woolf will ask whether we have lost the ability to experience these texts in their full richness: “are we reading wrongly? losing our sharp sight in the haze of associations? reading into Greek poetry not what they have but what we lack” (E4:48)? Translations in particular are the least satisfying as “their language is necessarily full of echoes and associations”, containing words which we ourselves “have made expressive to us of our own emotions” which can only offer us a “vague equivalent”, “blurring the outline” and “clouding the depths” of the expressiveness of the original versions, in particular words such as “sea, death, star and moon” which undeniably fail to have the same compass as the Greek terms “θάλασσα, θάνατος, άστιγμα, σελήνη” (E4:49) as they conjure up visions more suitable to Romantic poetry than the pure raw and highly expressive emotions which are woven into the fabric of the Greek language of the Homeric voyages. In such a way, highly aware of the connotations raised by the words she was using, Virginia Woolf often played with their ambivalence, with what she called their “sunken meanings”:72

72 “But [words] combine—they combine unconsciously together. The moment we single out and emphasize the suggestions as we have done here they become unreal; and we, too, become unreal—specialists, word mongers, phrase finders, not readers. In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river.” (‘Craftsmanship’, CE2: 248).
Now, this power of suggestion is one of the most mysterious properties of words. Everyone who has ever written a sentence must be conscious or half-conscious of it. Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations—naturally. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today—that they are so stored with meanings, with memories, that they have contracted so many famous marriages. The splendid word "incarnadine," for example—who can use it without remembering also "multitudinous seas"? (‘Craftsmanship’, CE2: 248)

In a similar way, T.S. Eliot will ponder throughout *The Four Quartets* what language is best to express his visions and emotions, as he finds that

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
> Always assail them.

“Sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity and its consolations” of her “own age” (‘On not knowing Greek’, E4:51), Woolf will remark on how certain images had lost their original expressive power and were running the risk of becoming common-place, sentimental or as Neville will say, in *The Waves*, “insincere” and “artificial”:

> it was not possible for [Modern poets] to be direct without being clumsy; or to speak simply of emotion without being sentimental. [...] The nightingale has only to be named by Sophocles and she sings. (‘On not knowing Greek’, E4:48)

---


75 “I am a poet, yes. Surely I am a great poet. Boats and youth passing and distant trees, “the falling fountains of the pendant trees”. I see it all. I feel it all. I am inspired. My eyes fill with tears. Yet even as I feel this, I lash my frenzy higher and higher. It foams. It becomes artificial, insincere.” (W, 59).
In ‘The String Quartet’, the mention of the nightingale is not fortuitous (the same goes of course for the images of the moon, the willow, the meandering river, the osier bed, etc.). Virginia Woolf has deliberately brought into play the sentimental connotations which such imagery would immediately raise in the mind of the (modern) reader. With all its Romantic connotations it would certainly seem out of place and only illustrate the sentimentality of the whole of the second dream-sequence, if it weren’t for the musical context which Virginia Woolf placed it in. In such a way, by extension, the (deliberate) sentimentality of the poetic images reflect a deliberate dramatization of narrator’s experience of Mozart’s slow movement in terms of “shamelessly” emotional sentimentalism, to echo James Hafley. Indeed, on the surface, she certainly manifests what many would term a simplistic understanding of music, listening with utmost naiveté. But as in the first dream-sequence, there are two levels at work in the second dream-sequence. On the one hand, we have an obvious reading of the narrator’s experience of the music in terms of self-confessed “silly” sentimental Romantic emotional imagery, which as such has very little interest from a musical point of view, but on the other hand, if we look a little closer, it appears that the dramatization of these emotions is more complex than it first seems and quite extraordinarily subversive. This, as we shall see, serves to illustrate a progressive dissolution from a sentimental type of literary emotional experience of the music, towards a Modern conception of the expression of the otherwise as yet undefined complex emotions.

For Virginia Woolf, these Romantic images thus symbolize for her the difficulty of writing original “vigorous” (‘On not knowing Greek’, E4:48) modern prose lamenting for a sort of literary paradise lost of pure “emotional” expressive qualities which had so far eluded contemporary literature, the essence of which, music could still capture. Repeatedly referring to the problematical image of the “nightingale” in her essays on the expressive potential of the modern novel, she will comment that

the whole tendency therefore of fiction is against prose poetry. The lesser novelists are not going to take risks which the greater deliberately avoid. They trust that, if only the egg is real and the kettle boils, stars and nightingales will somehow be thrown in by the imagination of the reader. And therefore all that side of the mind which is exposed in solitude they ignore. They ignore its thoughts, its rhapsodies, its dreams, with the result that the people of fiction bursting with energy on one side are atrophied on the other;
while prose itself, so long in service to this drastic master, has suffered the same
deformity, and will be fit, after another hundred years of such discipline, to write
nothing but the immortal works of Bradshaw and Baedeker. ('Impassioned Prose', E4:
362)

Thus deploring that the contemporary realist novel was considered to be more of an
eexample of “applied sociology” (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 436) than
anything else, Virginia Woolf will ask of prose, “adequate though it is to deal with the
common and the complex” (E4: 436), whether it can also

say the simple things which are so tremendous? Give the sudden emotions which are so
surprising? Can it chant the elegy, or hymn the love, or shriek in terror, or praise the
rose, the nightingale, or the beauty of night? (E4: 436)

Virginia Woolf had often entered into the debate surrounding some of the more
polemic trends in contemporary Modernist literature. In 1923 in particular, she
published a well-known and highly polemic essay, ‘Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown’ (E3:
384-388), a reaction against the criticism of Arnold Bennett (himself a staunch
“Edwardian” realist) who had written of Jacob’s Room: “I regard this book as
characteristic of the new novelists who have recently gained the attention of the alert
and the curious, and I admit that for myself I cannot yet descry any coming big
novelists.”76 Constantly questioning and re-asserting her own aesthetics, she had no
mercy for those novelists who were continuing in the tradition of nineteenth century
“journalistic” prose and whose sole aim was to tell a story, “jogging” (‘Is Fiction an
Art?’, E4: 459) us from event to event in order to get us to pass the time in avidly
turning the pages, breathlessly asking “as we ask at the ‘movies’, what is going to
happen next?” (E4: 459) before throwing it away onto the “rubbish-heap” once it had
served its purpose – very much like today’s “bestsellers”:

It must often strike the reader that very little criticism worthy of being called so has
been written in English of prose - our great critics have given the best of their minds to
poetry. And the reason perhaps why prose so seldom calls out the higher faculties of the

critic, but invites him to argue a case or to discuss the personality of the writer [...] is to be sought in the prose-writer's attitude to his own work. Even if he writes as an artist, without a practical end in view, still he treats prose as a humble beast of burden which must accommodate all sorts of odd ends; as an impure substance in which dust and twigs and flies find lodgement. But more often than not the prose-writer has a practical aim in view, a theory to argue, or a cause to plead, and with it adopts the moralist's view that the remote, the difficult, and the complex are to be abjured. His duty is to the present and the living. He is proud to call himself a journalist. He must use the simplest words and express himself as clearly as possible in order to reach the greatest number in the plainest way. Therefore he cannot complain of the critics if his writing, like the irritation in the oyster, serves only to breed other art; nor be surprised if his pages, once they have delivered their message, are thrown on the rubbish heap like other objects that have served their turn. ('De Quincey's Autobiography', CE4: 1)

In a virulent attack on the style and aim of the novels of the past and present, Virginia Woolf will assert her will to drag prose out of what she calls this "journalistic" "rubbish-heap" in order to revive its artistic potential which had been smothered under neglect and disregard, prose having been disparaged as unworthy of the higher aesthetic emotions:

If, then, we are daring and risk ridicule and try to see in what direction we who seem to be moving so fast are going, we may guess that we are going in the direction of prose and that in ten or fifteen years' time prose will be used for purposes for which prose has never been used before. That cannibal, the novel, which has devoured so many forms of art will by then have devoured even more. [...] It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. [...] What is important is that this book which we see on the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them. (Poetry, Fiction and the Future', E4: 435)

By possessing a stylistic "freedom", "fearlessness" and "flexibility" (E4: 435), prose was seen by Virginia Woolf to possess the means for expressing, above all "some of the attributes of poetry", in particular the expression of emotions, and thus become a powerful means of artistic expression, capable of "reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart" (JR, 92), in one word: communicating, as she herself revealed in the
first version of 'The String Quartet' (cf. SF, 301). In Virginia Woolf’s aesthetics, traditional Romantic poetic images are thus associated with the expressive potential which the novel of the future could attain:

We have come to forget that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death and fate [...]. We long for ideas, for dreams, for imaginations, for poetry. [...] In these respects then the novel or the variety of novel which will be written in time to come will take on some of the attributes of poetry. ('Poetry, Fiction and the Future', E4: 435)

However, as we have seen, Virginia Woolf will reflect on the difficulty that modern writers have had in dealing with the expression of such emotions, which in the context of modern prose seem out of place:

It is true that prose writers are daring; they are constantly forcing their instrument [...]. But one has always a feeling of discomfort in the presence of the purple patch of the prose poem. The objection to the purple patch, however, is not that it is purple but that it is a patch. (Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 437)

To explain the inherent contradiction which has insidiously made its way into the “modern mind” Virginia Woolf will continue by outlining a scene very much like the one conjured up in the second dream-sequence of ‘The String Quartet’ as she tries to give an example of the difference between the Romantic literary expression of emotions as epitomized by Keats in his ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and the difficulty which the moderns faced in the expression of emotions, in particular those “relations of man to Nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams” (Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4:436) which captured Virginia Woolf’s imagination:

It is a spring night, the moon is up, the nightingale singing, the willows bending over the river. Yes; but at the same time a diseased old woman is picking over her greasy rags on a hideous iron bench. She and the spring enter his mind together; they blend but do not mix. The two emotions, so incongruously coupled, bite and kick at each other in unison. But the emotion which Keats felt when he heard the song of a nightingale is one and entire, though it passes from joy in beauty to sorrow at the unhappiness of human fate. He makes no contrast. In his poem sorrow is the shadow which accompanies
beauty. In the modern mind beauty is accompanied not by its shadow but by its opposite. (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 433)

In an essay entitled ‘Flumina Amem Silvasque’, Woolf will find that in contrast to Tennyson whose style and attention to detail is akin to the “minute skills” of the pre-Raphaelite painters, “sifting words until the exact shade and shape of the flower or the cloud had its equivalent phrase”, Keats is the poet who best expresses “the mood and not the detail”, representing in his poems what he “saw with his eyes shut when the landscape had melted indistinguishably into the mood” (E2: 162-163). Noting how the modern novel is in danger of becoming a reflection of what Virginia Woolf sees as a practical, curious and scientific77 “sceptical and testing spirit” (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4:433), a “modern mind” (E4: 433) which also turns out to belong to a soulless,78 self-contained, isolated human being,79 she will puzzle over how “emotions which used to enter the mind whole are now broken up on the threshold” (E4: 433) and why “feelings which used to come simple and separate do so no longer” (E4: 433).

(iii) Beyond emotional sentimentalism: music as a model for an expression of the compounds of emotion of the “Modern Mind”

• On the emotions in music

Despite Eduard Hanslick’s staunch stance for an unemotional, formalist understanding of musical meaning, outlined in one of the most influential treatises on musical aesthetics, ‘Vom Musicalish-Schönen’, published in 1854 and still hotly under debate in current musicology, music has been (and still is) seen, time and time again, as being capable, usually above all the other arts, of representing, symbolizing,

77 cf. the newly invented wireless: “waves of sound [...] pour through the roof and speak aloud to him of battles and murders and strikes and revolutions all over the world” (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 433).
78 even war is waged “by companies and communities rather than by individuals” (ibid.).
79 “The long avenue of brick is cut up into boxes, each of which is inhabited by a different human being who has put locks on his doors and bolts on his window to ensure some privacy” (ibid.).
expressing, or even arousing\textsuperscript{80} intense emotions, feelings and moods in the hearer. That we associate certain emotions with certain types or styles of music or that we are emotionally moved by some performances raises a certain number of crucial musicological issues. As all roads invariably lead to Rome, the topic of musical meaning - emotional meaning in this case - invariably leads to the question as to whether music does or does not "represent" anything at all.\textsuperscript{81} Seeing music in such emotionalist terms is however hardly original: music is often thought to express feelings, moods and emotions\textsuperscript{82} - and by extension, atmosphere as well since the perception of atmosphere is linked to moods and emotions - either in the way that music arouses the emotions in the listeners, that the music represents the emotions or alternatively, that the emotions are properties of the music itself. In the second dream-sequence, all these facets of the musical expression of emotion are present. Not only are the emotions shown to be the properties of the music itself: the river (i.e. the music) is melancholy, but the narrator's feelings are unmistakably aroused by the music,\textsuperscript{83} as shows the slip from the impersonality of the first dream-sequence to the personal pronoun "I" in the second, as well as the fact that the narrator remarks on how the music "unseals my sorrow, thaws compassion". That music arouses emotions is a noted feature - that an audience may be moved to tears by a Chopin prelude just shows how often this is the case, but why they are so moved, what sort of emotion they are experiencing and where the music comes into play is a different matter.

\textsuperscript{80} it is beyond the scope of our investigation to differentiate in more detail the subtle differences between types of musical meaning, as this raises the questions as to whether the music actually "possesses" the qualities or whether we simply associated them metaphorically or conventionally. See Kivy, \textit{Introduction to a Philosophy of Music}, op. cit., for a substantial overview of the different theories involved.

\textsuperscript{81} see previous chapter on musical "make-believe".

\textsuperscript{82} cf. for instance these words by Jeremy Siepman on the "art" of listening to classical music: "The first way of listening is to be receptive to the emotions or states of mind that the music expresses, though it is often difficult to describe or even to recognise just what these are. In many way music takes up where words leave off. To an extent unknown to words, music can mirror the physical manifestations of human experience: crying, laughing, sighing, moaning, shouting, breathing, growling, soothing it can be jagged and extreme or calming, even seductive in its curvaceous contours; it can exactly imitate the changes in our pulse, the rate of our breathing, the subtlest outlines of all our non-verbal expression of life in all its infinite variety" in the "Art of the Listener - Ways of Listening", \textit{op.cit.}, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{83} we make a distinction here between the emotions "aroused", which Kivy considers the only proper arousal theory and the general extra-musical responses of the narrator, which the music provokes in her imagination. As Kivy has however pointed out, all expressive theories of music are fundamentally "arousal" theories: "what might be widely construed as arousal theories are other explanations of how music possesses expressive properties, which rely, at some point, on the arousal of some conscious state or other in the listener. But thus widely construed, every theory is an arousal theory, including the very cognitive theory Matravers opposes and I affirm", \textit{New Essays on Musical Understanding}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 150.
altogether, and as Alperson will say of Suzanne K. Langer’s theory of emotional content, “if we say that expression consists in the evocation of psychological states in the listener, we reduce musical composition to a psychological ploy whose aims are not far removed from those of the advertising agent”. Kivy will point out “I too acknowledge that the expressive properties of music move us in a way specific to them. Sad music emotionally moves me, qua sad music, by its musically beautiful sadness, happy music moves me, qua happy music, by its musically beautiful happiness. [...] That music sometimes moves us emotionally by its expressive properties, and the emotions it moves us to in those cases are not, literally, sadness, happiness, and the like”. If we look more closely at ‘The String Quartet’, even though the narrator experiences the music in highly emotive terms, she does not actually experience the emotions as such as she cannot even make up her mind as to whether she is happy or sad:

But the tune, like all his tunes, makes on despair – I mean hope. What do I mean? That’s the worst of music! I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine. (SQ, 139)

In such a way, the conclusion of the second dream-sequence is particularly revealing: the rose leaf falling “from an enormous height” symbolizes a possible positive outcome for the intense emotion of grief (it is itself compared to a parachute, i.e. something which saves the person falling to the ground), but “it won’t reach us”: the music cannot actually touch her. The effect of the slow melancholy music of the second dream-sequence hardly makes the narrator truly sad – she describes her dream as “silly”, and the music serves to excite her, in the second interval, to make her “pleased” and happy. If we work our way through the concatenation of metaphors, the music was made to represent a particular atmosphere which had strong emotional connotations, but more importantly, the music is also seen to be about the way music expresses these emotions (the whispering of the beloved and the singing of the wraith are all metaphors for the music itself). As Kivy would say, a sequence which passes

84 see Peter Kivy, New Essays on Musical Understanding, op.cit., chapt. 6 and 7.
“from joy to sorrow to joy must be intended to tell us something about human joy and sorrows; or, perhaps, it represents an emotive ‘happening’; or it tells an emotive story. In any event, it is in some way or other ‘about’ the emotions predicated of it.”87 In the second dream-sequence, the music is undeniably described by the narrator to be “about” sorrow and joy, in particular the way the music “weaves” these emotions together in a pattern. There are two problems which arise in relation to the representational and the “aboutness” theories. In the former case, we are in the presence of quite a simple matter: when such emotive interpretations of absolute music are made without a valid reason, even though it is widely admitted that certain musical qualities may give rise to emotional associations, they nevertheless remain precisely that, associations. There is indeed a generalized tendency in criticism, composition and amateur responses, to relate certain musical features with certain emotions.88 Speaking in particular of what he calls the “garden-variety” of emotions, i.e. the simple ordinary emotions (i.e. joy and sadness in particular, as opposed, for example, to Suzanne K. Langer’s complex and “unnamed” variety of emotions which we shall study below), Kivy will argue that one can, at a pinch, draw parallels between the purely musical characteristics which lead us to term music “melancholy”, and certain characteristics of “melancholy” human expressions and traits, in the same way that a St Bernard’s dog’s face “looks” sad or expresses sadness simply because of its drooping mouth and eyes (even though the dog is not sad in itself).89 The music may have features which express sadness even though sadness is not a property of the music itself (i.e. the music isn’t “sad”):

Melancholy music and melancholy speech and utterance have some obvious sound qualities in common. Melancholy people tend to express themselves in soft subdued tones of voice; and melancholy music tends to be soft and subdued. Melancholy people tend to speak slowly and haltingly; and melancholy music tends to be in slow tempi and halting rhythm. Melancholy people’s voices tend to ‘sink,’ and tend to remain in the low register; and melancholy music too exhibits the same characteristics. [...] a musical phrase may lap joyously, or droop, or falter, like a person in motion. To put it more

88 “It is agreed on all hands that music is melancholy, and cheerful, and so on, in virtue of certain standardly accepted features. It is perennially remarked on that these features bear analogy to the expression behavior, bodily, gestural, vocal, linguistic, of human beings.” Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, op. cit., p. 43.
generally, music is customarily described in terms of motion; and so the same
descriptions we use to characterize it are frequently the ones we use to describe the
visible motions of the human body in the expression of the garden-variety emotions.90

This he named the “contour theory”, though as a theory it is hardly original as such,
being simply a show of Ruskin’s ‘pathetic fallacy’ applied to music.91 The problem
remains when such an emotionalist response is made without reason, even though
certain musical figurations may give rise to an emotional interpretation, it remains an
extra-musical interpretation, “all of the ‘phenomenological’ descriptions we give of
music use terms that have reference to ‘life’ as well as to music”,92 and only under
certain very limited conditions can such interpretations be made:

Because a piece of music can be melancholy and then joyful, it can be interpreted as
representing a melancholy and then joyful human experience or a melancholy followed
by a joyful event. The obvious question to ask, of course, is when, under what
conditions, are we entitled to interpret a musical structure? And the natural answer is:
when the composer licenses it.93

As Ruskin himself said, there can always be made a distinction between the objective
characteristics of the object in itself, “the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of
things to us”, and the emotion which we endowed it with, “the extraordinary, or false
appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy”.
Such “false appearances”, are indeed “entirely unconnected with any real power or
character in the object, and only imputed to it by us”.94 An early Mozart string quartet
is hardly programme music. In terms of musical response, the narrator is undoubtedly
reading into the sounds the type of melancholy characteristics which Kivy outlines
above but undoubtedly, and again, we must emphasize, quite deliberately, the narrator

91 Interestingly, Virginia Woolf disliked the idea of ‘pathetic fallacy’ in fiction as she once said, “a
great imaginative feat it would be to understand the point of view of a Sussex labourer: There is too
much of the ‘pathetic fallacy’ in all our novels; tears in a dogs eyes, joy in an old horse.” PA: 371.
92 Peter Kivy, Music Alone, op.cit., p. 194.
93 Peter Kivy, Music Alone, op.cit., p. 198.
94 quotes from Ruskin, “Of the Pathetic Fallacy”, in Modern Painters (1856), volume III, pt. 4, online:
is made by Woolf to respond in terms of emotion quite unwarrantedly to what is otherwise absolute music, and this, as we shall now see, for a very good reason.

Virginia Woolf will describe the expressive power of the endless flow of changing colours and textures given by Wagner’s harmonically overlapping and chromatic style of composition in terms of “fusion”, “completeness” and “fullness”. It is by listening to Wagner in 1909, that Virginia Woolf first realized the possible analogy she could draw between music and consciousness, in particular how the music revealed how one’s emotions are blended together and that one’s impressions are complex multiples which cannot and should not be separated artificially, prefiguring Suzanne K. Langer’s notion that music may symbolize those complex shades of emotions which escape linguistic definition and whose ambivalence and constantly changing nature bar us from even naming, leading Woolf to state that

it is here [in Bayreuth] that we realise [...] how fused our impressions are with elements which we may not attempt to separate. (‘Impressions at Bayreuth’, E1:291-292)

Suzanne K. Langer’s theory of musical expression is particularly seductive inasmuch as she finds that music is of all the arts the one which expresses these compounds of emotions which are impossible to put into words because words are too limited in their sense and fail to truly represent the complexity of certain emotions. Music is thus seen by Langer to express the minute shades of emotion which we experience but rarely manage to express. Kivy will make a distinction between these and the more simple types of “garden-variety” emotions for which we have words (love, hate, anger, sadness, etc.). William James, in his study of consciousness, will similarly describe how our impressions are made out of “compounds” of data, giving painting and music as examples:

In general, then, if an object affects us simultaneously in a number of ways, abcd, we get a peculiar integral impression, which thereafter characterizes to our mind the individuality of that object, and becomes the sign of its presence; and which is only resolved into a, b, c, d, respectively by the aid of farther experiences. [...] All the colours we actually experience are mixtures. Even the purest primaries always come to us with some white. Absolutely pure red or green or violet is never experienced, and so we can never be discerned in the so-called primaries with which we
have to deal: the latter consequently pass for pure. -- The reader will remember how an overtone can only be attended to in the midst of its consorts in the voice of a musical instrument, by sounding it previously alone. The imagination, being then full of it, hears the like of it in the compound tone. [...] Very few elements of reality are experienced by us in absolute isolation. The most that usually happens to a constituent \( a \), of a compound phenomenon \( abcd \), is that its \textit{strength} relatively to \( bcd \) varies from a maximum to a minimum; or that it appears linked with \textit{other} qualities, in other compounds, as \( ae fg, \) or \( ahik. \)

In such a way, it is nearly impossible to actually distinguish any of the elements which build up the compound of our experiences:

the analysis of a compound never perfect, because no element is ever given to us absolutely alone, and we can never therefore approach a compound with the image in our mind of any one of its components in a perfectly pure form. Colors, sounds, smells, are just as much entangled with other matter as are more formal elements of experience, such as extension, intensity, effort, pleasure, difference, likeness, harmony, badness, strength, and even consciousness itself. All are embedded in one world.

Just as the blend of the many musical harmonic colours of Wagner’s style which heralded the Modernist move away from tonality altogether, making it impossible to point out a clear-cut harmonic progression of simple major/minor triadic chords, by extension, it became difficult to confer to this music defined concepts or emotions to specific musical events.

- \textit{“Sorrow” and “joy”: the subversion of sentimentality in the second dream-sequence}

In such a way, if we read between the lines, from a structural point of view, this dream sequence actually blurs the boundaries between the two emotional opposites, “sorrow” and “joy”. From a musical point of view, these opposites are meant to be figuratively present in the music, possibly featuring as two distinct themes, one of a

\footnotesize


96 \textit{ibid.}, p. 507.
perceived mournful character, the other joyful, one in a minor key, the other perhaps in a major key, etc. the whole movement constructed according to the plan of a rough sonata-form. The tripartite structure of this dream-sequence could indeed certainly correspond to an exposition (first paragraph), development (second paragraph) and recapitulation (third paragraph). As in a typical sonata-form, the themes joy and sorrow, like the two usually contrasting musical themes found in classical expositions, remain distinctly separate in the exposition, the words “sorrow” each emphasized as it is repeated, the words “sorrow” and “joy” separated by a full stop and finally “crashing” together (SQ, 140). The romantic dream of the “exposition” shatters abruptly as the emotions, given to us separately, fail to unite, leading to a central passage, which in music would be a section which develops and varies the thematic material presented in the exposition, is dominated by the metaphor of weaving, linked to the imagery of the willow trees and osier beds growing along the edges of the river, symbolizing a musical weaving of emotions. The two figures which rise into the sky could also been seen to be a personification of the two emotions of the previous section – joy and sorrow, “woven together, inextricably commingled, bound in pain and strewn in sorrow” and finally, in a show of Romantic transcendence, “deftly, subtly, weav[ing] in and out until in this pattern, this consummation, the cleft ones unify” (SQ, 140), climax of this section – joy and sorrow as one complex emotion, the one the shadow of the other, neither being more predominant, “sorrow and joy” (SQ, 140, my italics). Finally the narrator herself seems to question the third section: “Why then grieve? Ask what? Remain unsatisfied?” , which possibly hints at it being the repetition (the recapitulation) of the first section (the exposition), a return to the sorrowful melancholy atmosphere of the exposition section – which, for the narrator’s imagination, is incomprehensible and illogical. This repeat would indeed seem superfluous after the transcendent climax of the development where the narrator had found that “all” had been “settled”, the opposites joy and sorrow had unified. Another indication that the third part is possibly the recapitulation is suggested by the fact that

97 Werner Wolf also (briefly) considers this second movement to be a sonata-form, even though we actually differ in our interpretation of the recapitulation: “The internal structure of the movement is clearly ternary: this is suggested by the subdivision of its verbal correlative into three paragraphs [...]. In this ternary structure one could even be inclined to see some analogies to sonata form, since the first paragraph introduces (in an ‘exposition’) two antagonistic subjects, “sorrow” and “joy”, which in the subsequent ‘development’ are opposed to each other, before they find a ‘harmonious’ relation to each other in the final section (the ‘recapitulation’).” Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 153.
the central climactic “high” point is framed by the strong downward motion suggested by the slanting rays of the moon, the trailing willow-boughs, the boat sinking, and finally in the recapitulation, the rose-leaves, “falling. Falling. [...] falling from an enormous height” (SQ, 140). The phrase “Ah, but they cease”, would indicate a pause in the flow of the music, and the start of the final coda to this movement, a coda which remains suspensive as the last rose leaf fails to fall onto the grave. The last rose leaf cannot settle as it “turns, flutters waveringly” and finally, the narrator exclaims in despair: “it won’t reach us” (SQ, 140). The last rose leaf doesn’t reach the grave, and thus the narrator’s yearning remains unfulfilled, the process of grieving is unfinished, the narrator is unsatisfied.

However, within this musical structure, the first sign of the subversion of the otherwise sentimental atmosphere occurs in the transition between the first and second movements. At that point, the thoughts of the narrator were turning during the first interval towards ideas of “indecent” stories:

I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine. Or an indecent story, now – I could relish that. The older one grows the more one likes indecency. (SQ, 139)

The narrator then starts laughing, presumably at an “indecent” private joke of her own which has something to do with the “old gentleman opposite” and possibly his companion, the person who made the disparaging remarks about the music being an “early Mozart”. Even though they certainly said “nothing” (SQ, 139) remotely funny in itself, the serious “informed” tone of these listeners itself creates a rather striking and humorous contrast with the “silliness” of the narrator’s dreams of fish and rivers (“Hah, hah! I’m laughing. What at? You said nothing, nor did the old gentleman opposite... But suppose – suppose – Hush!”, SQ, 139). Having established this risqué and humorous atmosphere in the first interval, Woolf however then juxtaposes it with the subdued, delicate, mournful and very “decent” tone of the second dream-sequence. Within this second dream-sequence, the seeds of the Romantic “poetic” scenes are surprisingly short lived. In fact, they are hardly sketched out before something happens to distract the narrator’s attention away from their sentimental atmosphere. Indeed, abruptly, and quite unromantically we may add, the lovers’ boat prosaically sinks mid-sentence and more surprisingly, mid-emotional flight – the
dreamy nostalgic atmosphere is shattered by the mundane, unpoetic and unmusical exclamation “crash!” – I would disagree to a certain point with Werner Wolf who contends that this interjection is meant to be an “acoustic imitation of a surprising fortissimo chord” as the word “crash” is more expressive of “noise” rather than a musical event. A purely musical “interpretation” of this exclamation distracts from the subversive role of the word within the literary sphere of the narrative - followed by the three short clipped syllables of the direct phrase “the boat sinks”, thus effectively breaking through the swing of the rhythm (the repetition of “sorrow” and “joy”, the parallel construction of “bound in pain”, “strewn in sorrow”, etc.) and the alliterations (in /b/, /p/, /n/ and /d/ “bound in pain”, and /l/, /s/ and /w/ “strewn in sorrow”) which are literally interwoven into the phrase:

Sorrow, sorrow. Joy, joy. Woven together, inextricably commingled, bound in pain and strewn in sorrow - crash!
The boat sinks.

Shifting tone at this point, the narrative starts again in this central section by turning into a sort of mock Gothic horror story which prefigures the opening scene of the last dream-sequence: just as the lovers on the grass are ghosts, having left their bodies “in the banqueting hall” (SQ, 140), in the second dream-sequence, the two lovers drown and the shadows of their souls rise up from the water, weaving together to form a rather daunting fiery tipped “dusky wraith” in the dark sky of the narrator’s “sunless world” (SQ, 140), an image which strongly suggests the Ancient Greek “underworld”, the land of the dead which never sees the sun, the land to which Orpheus travelled to fetch Eurydice and Endymion searched for Cynthia. The original descriptive boat-trip is gradually and quite literally dissolved into an expression of pure emotion as the “wraith” itself dissolves and becomes pure sound, a disembodied voice, which “sings” for the narrator alone, reminiscent of Keat’s experience of his invisible nightingale. But again, this intense Romantic atmosphere is shattered as the

99 The idea of plunging below the surface into the depths is more explicit in the original version of ‘The String Quartet’, when the narrator speaks in this movement of having “gone under”: “There’s very little to be said after a slow movement by Mozart. Together we’ve been under”. (SF, 301)
100 Michael Ferber, op.cit., p. 209.
narrator suddenly emerges from her dream and quite lucidly questions the music in the everyday tone of the spoken voice (cf. the contraction of “all has” into “all’s” and the assertion “yes”): “Why then grieve? Ask what? Remain unsatisfied? I say all’s been settled; yes”, but again, as the music continues to play, she starts dreaming again. Finally, at the end of the movement she is still lost in her thoughts, and will only half hear her fellow listener commenting on the fact that the second violin was late while she was thinking that the last rose leaf “won’t reach us”, a phrase which can be read as a reflection she is making on what she perceives as an unsatisfactory ending to the piece (the piece finishing on the wavering flight of the leaf rather than finishing in a settled manner, as she was hoping) rather than being a part of the musical narrative as such. The juxtaposition of the tragic failure of the piece to put the narrator’s emotions at rest and the comment that the second violin was late emphasizes the narrator’s isolation, but instead of showing the dream in a negative light, this final mark of subversion has the exact opposite effect, the thoughts of the narrator seeming to be more relevant and profound than any second violin being late – she was indeed listening to the music, her friend was listening to the technique of the performers.

Music is therefore seen by Woolf to be a manifestation of the “shades of being” (L5: 315) which escape language and definition and which the Modernist artists sought to capture in their art. Music does not, for Woolf, represent these shades of being but embodies them and as such, they remain just as abstract, unnamed and indistinct in music as they do in life itself. The progression from the clear-cut sentimental imagery of Romantic poetry towards the undefined abstract emotion of the final scene of this dream-sequence, and the discrepancy between the narrator’s apparent grief and sadness and the subsequent feelings of elation and excitement in the interval which follows this movement highlights the struggle which Modernist writers faced when trying to express the emotional side of the life of the mind which was perceived to elude linguistic definition but not musical expression.

- **Suggesting versus showing in the third dream-sequence: the musical origins of Woolf’s cinema of the future**

Whereas the problem of expressing the hitherto inexpressible complex emotions was mainly thematized in the second dream-sequence, as we have just
shown, Woolf will endeavour to show in the third dream-sequence how the novel of the future may actually express these complex emotions by favouring a style of writing which would “suggest” rather than “show” the emotions by attempting a veiled critique of the contemporary cinematographic style of writing in order to reveal how her thoughts on the cinema of the future are in themselves determined by her musical aesthetics.

Of all the dreams, the first half of the third dream-sequence is the one the most concerned with an unadulterated story-telling of the most exciting nature, more suited it would seem to the style of an adventure book or a Gothic romance than an “interpretation” of a Mozart string quartet. Superficially, the story does seem to make sense – two characters meet on the grass outside the banqueting hall of a Medieval castle and after declaring their love, return to the castle. There is a sword-fight but they are both finally reunited and escape. Reflecting the character of a fast lively finale, speed is here of the essence: the breathless nature of the narrative is achieved in particular by the repetition of the connective “and” as the narrator adds peripatet after peripatet. The verbs and adjectives suggest speed and motion and the sense of urgency is emphasized by the maze-like layout of the castle through which the lady is running for her life as well as the complicated story-line. The third dream-sequence certainly exemplifies the very “fluent and graphic” style of a tale told orally. In the narrator’s dream, we are however made to be the mere spectators of a lively but finally quite incomprehensible scene. The suspense and drama is quite noteworthy - we are dying to know what happens after the Prince snatches the rapier off the wall to fight with the gentleman who was left stabbing the air with his sword and crying “Mad! Mad! Mad!” but quite calmly at that point, the narrator of the String Quartet will pause mid-action to tell us most colloquially about the history of the rapier (“The King of Spain’s gift, you know”), to describe the “large vellum book” or the Prince’s “velvet skull-cap and furred slippers”, creating a sense of suspense which certainly leaves us hanging at each and every word. In the same way, the narrator is distracted

101 It seem unlikely that this movement is a minuet as Werner Wolf (The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the theory and history of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 154) has rather perfunctorily suggested. He deduces this from the fact that it is the third movement of the quartet, sometimes a minuet (but this contradicts in itself his interpretation of the quartet being in three movements rather than four, as it is exceptional for any quartet to end on a minuet movement, it being usually the third of four movements), the “serene atmosphere” and the “old-fashioned associations” of the images, but as we shall see, the movement can hardly be described as “serene”.

174
by the sound of the horns, and doesn’t properly finish her story which tails off as the narrator’s attention is diverted towards a different scene:

I escaped, flinging on this cloak to hide the ravages to my skirt – to hide... But listen!
The horns! (SQ, 141)

The suspense will never be resolved. Throughout the next section, the narrator seems to be skimming through her story, giving us a hurried dénouement (“the words are indistinguishable though the meaning is plain enough – love, laughter, flight, pursuit, celestial bliss”) because her attention has been caught by the horns and the new scene which is being sketched out in her imagination, leaving us yet again with what Forster terms a “ragged end”, characteristic of story-telling. Throughout this dream-sequence, we were furthermore not told clearly what is happening or even who the characters are. We do not know why the lovers are meeting on the grass clandestinely, nor why they need to escape. We do not know if the gentleman who stepped on the lady’s petticoat is the same as the one declaring his love on the grass outside the banqueting hall. We do not know why he starts stabbing the air with his sword with such violence, nor why he is shouting “Mad! Mad! Mad!”, nor do we know who the Prince is nor the outcome of the duel. There is no transition between the first part and the central section and there is a gap in the narrative – the story breaks off mid-action when the narrator’s mind is distracted by the sound of the horns, the lady escaping and her lover left behind battling with the Prince. In the next passage, the lovers have already escaped and are incomprehensibly reunited. As Virginia Woolf writes, in this style of writing, “a man can elope with a woman without our noticing it” (‘Life and the Novelist’, E4:403). Indeed, the escape of the lovers in ‘The String Quartet’ goes very much unnoticed amidst the tumult and confusion of the horn-calls. To quote Woolf,

all is fluent and graphic; but no character or situation emerges cleanly. Bits of extraneous matter are left sticking to the edges. For all their brilliance, the scenes are clouded; the crises are blurred. (‘Life and the Novelist’, E4:403)

Reading this dream-sequence as a fictionalization of music, we may infer from the narrator’s response the presence of two opposing themes or voices, the first in the higher register (cf. the lady “runs up the scale”, “culminating”, “floated out on the gayest ripple”, etc.) and the second probably in a lower tone (the gentleman), in a vivacious musical dialogue (“witty exchange of compliment”). This is one of the most commonplace intermedial parallels and again, it works both ways, the music giving rise to notions of dialogue between musical voices or instruments and mirroring this, non-musical situations spoken of in terms of “polyphony”. But as in the previous dream-sequences, if we look more closely at the narrative, a certain degree of subversion creeps into the story-line as it becomes particularly ambiguous and even nonsensical. The central passage (the sword-fight) is strangely reminiscent of a medley of Elizabethan drama, but parodied beyond recognition. The narrator, at this point, most explicitly projects herself into the story (“He followed me down the corridor”, “I escaped”, etc.) but the sound of the horns disrupts her concentration and she suddenly finds herself again outside the story, which is told once again from a more impersonal and general point of view: “the gentleman replies so fast to the lady” (SQ, 141). The most striking characteristic of the whole of this passage, and this, despite the identification of the narrator with the character, is that it is narrated from a totally external point of view, mainly focusing on the visual nature of the story. This external point of view adopted by Virginia Woolf in the imaginative and descriptive duel scene bears striking resemblances to what she describes as the cinema’s attempts at rendering literature on the screen and this would explain the tongue-in-cheek nature of the nonsensical opening narrative of this dream-sequence. The cinema, in the early 1920s, “fell upon its prey”, literature, “with immense rapacity and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. [...] the results have been disastrous to both”. Instead of conjuring up the “inside” of Anna Karenina’s “mind”,

103 we shall return at far greater length to the question of musical polyphony in literature in chapters 4 and 5.

104 One thinks here of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet – in particular the duel-scene which features a “rapier”, cf. Romeo’s words: “Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up.”, Act III, Scene 1. The stabbing of the air brings to mind the Banquet scene from Macbeth, when Macbeth sees and challenges Banquo’s ghost, even though none of the other characters do, Act III, scene 4. There are possibly more references in this short story to Shakespearian tragedies, “goodnight, goodnight” for instance, at the end of the story is reminiscent of Ophelia’s “Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night”, Hamlet, Act IV, scene 5, a phrase which T.S. Eliot was also to use in ‘A Game of Chess’, The Waste Land, op.cit., p. 66, a poem published by the Hogarth Press in 1923 and written at the same time as Woolf’s ‘The String Quartet’ (cf. D2: 178).
“her charm, her passion, her despair”, which is what made Tolstoy’s work a masterpiece of literary expression, “all the emphasis is now laid upon her teeth, her pearls and her velvet”:

The cinema proceeds, ‘Anna falls in love with Vronsky’ – that is to say the lady in black velvet falls into the arms of a gentleman in uniform and they kiss with enormous succulence, great deliberation, and infinite gesticulation on a sofa in an extremely well appointed library. (‘The Cinema’, E4:350)

In a similar way, in ‘The String Quartet’, we are given a wealth of visual details, in particular focusing on the clothes of the protagonists and the furniture of the castle: the depiction of the “lace” of the petticoat, the “large vellum book”, the “oriel window”, the King of Spain’s “rapier” which had been on display, hanging on the castle’s wall, the prince’s “velvet skull-cap and furred slippers”, etc. Even the few exclamations uttered by the characters in an otherwise silent scene, “Ah!” and “Mad! Mad! Mad!”, bear some analogy to the screen-shots of the silent films, those “words of one syllable written in the scrawl of an illiterate schoolboy”105 (‘The Cinema’, E4:350) which spell out what is happening on the screen. In such a way, the scene seems to be shown to us as if we are seeing it through the lens of a camera. Virginia Woolf will write about the potentiality of this new form of art in a way which is strangely reminiscent of what she attempted to do in ‘The String Quartet’. Woolf will ask, how can the cinema, an art which relies so heavily on the visual and the concrete go beyond being a mere show of the external aspect of life and “walk erect” as an art in itself - an art which, for Virginia Woolf, has to distanciate itself from its most obvious and superficial characteristics. Virginia Woolf will criticize the tendency for film directors to recreate in their works only the external aspects of life, standing behind their cameras like “savages”, failing to see its true expressive potential and being seduced by the “showing” rather than the “suggesting”, misled by the “simple, even stupid” modalities of this new invention. In this essay, Virginia Woolf will most interestingly speak about the future of this new art, which, “while all the other arts were born naked, this, the youngest, has been born fully-clothed” (CE2: 272):

there is the king shaking hands with a football team; there is Sir Thomas Lipton’s yacht; there is Jack Horner winning the Grand National. The eye licks it up all instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think. For the ordinary eye, the English unaesthetic eye, is a simple mechanism which takes care that the body does not fall down coal-holes, provides the brain with toys and sweetmeats to keep it quiet, and can be trusted to go on behaving like a competent nursemaid until the brain comes to the conclusion that it is time to wake up. [...] But the picture-makers seem dissatisfied with such obvious sources of interest as the passage of time and the suggestiveness of reality. (“The Cinema’, CE2: 268-269)

Whereas within a literary text, the visual is “only the most obvious or the uppermost” element within the text’s “compact of a thousand suggestions”, the “complex ideas” and the “chains of images”, the cinema “has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” (CE2: 269).

In such a way, Virginia Woolf will speak of the difference between expressing the poor garden-variety type of emotions, which she considers as quite “irrelevant” (E4: 352) and the more interesting complex emotions she was after herself. As the cinema at that time was silent, phrases and words were flashed on the screen in between the scenes and rough symbols are used to convey the meaning: “a kiss is love. A broken cup is jealousy. A grin is happiness. Death is a hearse” (CE2: 270). But rather than saying “I am afraid”, the cinema should, for Virginia Woolf, suggest fear by other means, marvelling at the “shadow shaped like a tadpole”, which “swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity” in the 1919 Expressionist silent film, Dr Caligari,106 and was far more expressive of fear itself than any “gestures and words of men and women in a state of fear” (CE2, 270, see screen-shot below). The purely “visual” emotions are hardly the most important.

---

In the paintings of those Post Impressionist painters, Cézanne, Matisse, Derain and Picasso, “the whole scene, however solidly and pictorially built up, is always dominated by an emotion which has nothing to do with the eye” (‘Pictures’, E4: 244). Virginia Woolf reveals here her fascination for the power of expression of the abstract qualities of emotions: “‘Terror’ has besides its ordinary forms the shape of a tadpole: it burgeons, bulges, quivers, disappears” (‘The Cinema’, CE2: 268-269). In the same way, “anger” is “not merely rant and rhetoric, red faces and clenched fists. It is perhaps a black line wriggling upon a white sheet. Anna and Vronsky need no longer scowl and grimace” (‘The Cinema’, CE2: 268-269). The difference between suggesting and showing therefore lies in the dichotomy between the concrete external manifestation of the emotion or thought, “clothed”, as it were, in words and visual gestures, and its more complex fundamental, direct, abstract qualities, bringing forth something abstract, something moving. [...] Of such movements, of such abstractions the films may in time to come be composed [...] If to this reality he could add emotion, and thought, then he would begin to haul his booty in hand over hand. (‘The Cinema’, E4: 351)

107 The picture of Dr Kaligari (played by Werner Kruß) is taken from http://www.celtoslavica.de/chiaroscuro/films/caligari/caligari.html.
The role of music in this story could thus be understood as a way to facilitate the metamorphosis towards an expression of abstraction, of pure energy and vitality, away from the representation of external facts:

Watching crowds, watching the chaos of the streets in the lazy way in which faculties detached from us watch and wait, it seems sometimes as if movements and colours, shapes and sounds had come together and waited for someone to seize them and convert their energy into art; then uncaught, they disperse and fly asunder again. At the cinema for a moment through the mists of irrelevant emotions, through the thick counterpane of immense dexterity and enormous efficiency one has glimpses of something vital within. (E4:352)

Virginia Woolf enacts this metamorphosis away from the superficial cinematographic style in the third dream-sequence. If we return for a moment to ‘The String Quartet’, it certainly appears that in the first half of the third dream-sequence, the narrative is entirely visual, but in the second half, the music is referred to explicitly, as we have already mentioned:

The gentleman replies so fast to the lady, and she runs up the scale with such witty exchange of compliment now culminating in a sob of passion, that the words are indistinguishable though the meaning is plain enough – love, laughter, flight, pursuit, celestial bliss – all floated out on the gayest ripple of tender endearment. (SQ, 141)

The metaphor of “running up” suggests, by association with the complex layout of the castle of the opening passage, that the couple is running up some stairs as they are fleeing, but as this is associated with the musical term “scale”, the action becomes at this point subsumed to the music and reflects a purely musical or abstract gesture. At this point, significantly, words become unnecessary – they are “indistinguishable” but the meaning is still clear though given to us in a conceptual way rather than a visual way. Thus, in a mise en abyme of the previous scene, the narrative shifts tone to focus on the more abstract concepts of “love, laughter, flight, pursuit, celestial bliss” which had underpinned the graphic descriptive actions of the opening passage. The dichotomy created by the juxtaposition of the descriptive duel scene and its musical source of inspiration becomes all the more significant as the descriptive is abstracted into concepts. Again, as in the previous dream-sequences, the concrete is abstracted
and the particular becomes general. In such a way, as a reflection on the shortcomings of the cinematographic model, the passage certainly serves its purpose, as not only does it not make any sense in itself but the musical backdrop Furthermore puts it into question in the central passage. As an exploration of musical meaning, the first part of the third dream-sequence primarily highlights the narrator's evermore far-fetched and finally questionable original cinematographic response. Indeed, the tendency to get lost in the details of "life", in particular what we see of the external manifestations of life, is of course specific to the representative arts, literature in particular, as writers have to deal with "a problem which does not afflict the workers in other arts to the same extent" ('Life and the Novelist', E4:404). Considering that music above all is an art which may take its distances from the external depiction of life, it may indeed more easily make abstraction of reality and achieve the effects which Virginia Woolf was after in her novels.

Showing the visual, external features of life is hardly confined to the cinema. Virginia Woolf will find some literary styles in themselves "cinematographic", in the worst sense of the word. As Forster will ask in his conclusion to his study of the novel, "it is tempting to conclude by speculations as to the future of the novel, will it become more or less realistic, will it be killed by the cinema, and so on." Thus, Woolf will write in her essay 'Life and the Novelist' that "the grudging voice will concede that it is all very brilliant; will admit that a hundred pages have flashed by like a hedge seen from an express train; but will reiterate that for all that something is wrong" ('Life and the Novelist', E4:402-403).

All this representation of the movement of life has sapped our imaginative power. We have sat receptive and watched, with our eyes rather than with our minds, as we do at the cinema, what passes on the screen in front of us. [...] The characters are built up by observing the incoherence, the fresh natural sequences of a person who, wishing to tell the story of a friend's life in talk, breaks off a thousand times to bring in something fresh, to add something forgotten, so that in the end, though one may feel that one has been in the presence of life, the particular ladling out of sentences which have the dripping brilliance of words that live upon real lips, is admirable for one purpose; disastrous for another. ('Life and the Novelist', E4:403)

That Virginia Woolf may have attempted in the narrator’s third dream-sequence a parody of that cinematographic style of writing is hardly surprising considering her views on the matter and the underlying irony of her story. What is however interesting is why she chose the backdrop of a *finale* of a Mozart string quartet to do so. We have touched elsewhere upon the specific interdisciplinary and musicological problem of making up stories to fit the music and we shall not return to them at this point. This particular passage illustrates only too well to what extent the story may depart from the actual music so as to make the music all but unrecognizable. Woolf’s thoughts on the cinema “of the future” give us however a further clue as to understanding the purpose of her musicalization of fiction in this third dream sequence.

As we have already seen, if the cinema were to take into account the expressive potential of its own particular cinematographic qualities, it would have far more artistic relevance. But what is interesting is that these expressive cinematographic qualities are in fact akin to musical qualities. Indeed, often overlooked in Woolfian criticism, the cinema’s own potential is underpinned in Woolf’s view by her fundamentally musical aesthetics. For Woolf, the cinema of the future shows uncanny resemblances to her conception of the novel of the future and interestingly finds its roots in ‘The String Quartet’, one of her lesser-known and usually disparaged melopoetic experimental sketches and one which significantly appeals to music. By showing what the cinema could do if only it were to stand on its own feet using the wealth of its own idiosyncratic expressive modalities, Woolf reveals *mutatis mutandis*, what she herself was striving towards in literature, ‘The String Quartet’ being a prime example of Woolf’s experimentation with a new form of literary style:

The film-maker has enormous riches at his command. The exactitude of reality and its surprising power of suggestion are to be had for the asking. [...] If into this reality he could breathe emotion, could animate the perfect form with thought, then his booty could be hauled in hand over hand. [...] We should see these emotions mingling together and affecting each other.

We should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collisions. The most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain; the dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened
rooms, could be realized before our waking eyes. No fantasy could be too far-fetched or insubstantial. The past could be unrolled, distances annihilated, and the gulf which dislocate novels [...] could by the sameness of the background, by the repetition of some scene, be smoothed away. ('The Cinema', CE2: 271-272)

Quite noticeably, what Woolf suggests here for the cinema is exactly what she endeavoured to do five years previously in 1921 in ‘The String Quartet’ with its “far-fetched” fantasies of fountains and cascades in the first dream-sequence, the violent clash of emotions, sorrow and joy, hope and despair, in the second dream-sequence, the far-fetched fantasy of the duel scene and finally the arches and battlements of the great city in the third dream-sequence, all flashed before our minds in close succession within the compact format of the short story and pinned together by the repetition of certain features and images across the dream-sequences and most importantly, by the “sameness” of the river background, itself a metaphor for the musical background. The sheer speed and the resulting disjointed kaleidoscopic narrative serve to obscure the realism and give us only the impression of the whole. As such, the cinematographic model is not so much of a model than an analogy for what Virginia Woolf was trying to do in her novels, music remaining for her in both cases the aesthetic paradigm. Most interesting is the way Virginia Woolf draws, even within the most humorous and satirical context, an analogy between the modalities of the cinema and those of music, thus revealing a deeper link which she perceives between these two forms of art:

People say that the savage no longer exists in us, that we are at the fag-end of civilization, that everything has been said already, and that it is too late to be ambitious. But these philosophers have presumably forgotten the movies. They have never seen the savages of the twentieth century watching the pictures. They have never sat themselves in front of the screen and thought how for all the clothes on their backs and the carpets at their feet, no great distance separates them from those bright-eyed naked men who knocked two bars of iron together and heard in that clangour a foretaste of the music of Mozart.

The bars in this case, of course, are so highly wrought and so covered over with accretions of alien matter that it is extremely difficult to hear anything distinctly. All is hubble-bubble, swarm and chaos. [...] For a strange thing has happened – while all the other arts were born naked, this, the youngest, has been born fully-clothed. It can say
everything before it has anything to say. It is as if the savage tribe, instead of finding two bars of iron to play with, had found scattering the seashore fiddles, flutes, saxophones, trumpets, grand pianos by Erard and Bechstein, and had begun with incredible energy, but without knowing a note of music, to hammer and thump upon them all at the same time. (‘The Cinema’, CE2: 268)

Thus chronologically determined by her understanding of music, her essay on the cinema, dating from 1926, shows how much Virginia Woolf’s understanding of the potential of the art of cinema and by extension, of her thoughts on the potential of prose, owes to her interest in the musical model governing modern artistic expression as had been shown in her parody of the cinematographic style in the context of the musical performance of ‘The String Quartet’. By putting these views into play in the third dream-sequence, by putting the visual severely under strain in its musical context, Virginia Woolf thus distanciates herself from the “visual” novel in order to get closer to this elusive truth which lies beyond the appearances. This is the subject of the final section of this chapter.

c. Music and the search for truth

So far, our investigation of the link between music and the “inner” life, be it the stream of consciousness or the emotions, in Woolf’s literary aesthetics, has highlighted the way Modernist authors, Woolf in particular, turned away from a realistic or even visual depiction of what had up to then been considered to be the “true” reality, to explore instead the uncharted territory of the mind itself, music being seen as the form of art closest to expressing the actual process of the consciousness or the complex emotions, as we outlined above. Unlike many other authors however, the finality of Woolf’s interest in the consciousness is not the consciousness in itself, but the interaction between the consciousness and the external life: an external life redefined in the light of this new (musical) understanding of the mind. In such a way, reality is perceived differently, and music is seen to play a central role in our perception of our surrounding world. By going beyond an analysis of what are, after all, common-place relations between mind and music in Modernist thought, we shall study in the following pages how music is, for Woolf, connected with the phenomenological aspect of our very being.
(i) Marching into the desert of absolute music: the final dream-sequence

As we have already mentioned, T.S. Eliot was particularly impressed by the last few pages of Woolf’s short story. The ending of ‘The String Quartet’ is so strikingly different from the rest of the dream-sequences as to merit a study in itself as its many implications shed light on the whole of the narrator’s musical experience. We shall therefore study the final dream-sequence in relation to the opening of the short story, i.e. the scene before the start of the performance itself, which we have not yet spoken of. Whereas the previous three dream-sequences brought into play typical and conventional responses to music which Woolf subtly subverted, thus giving us intimations of what she was after in her story in a negative way (i.e. the musical experience is not about free-association, is not about sentimentality and emotionalism, is not about seeing images and stories in sounds), the fourth dream-sequence, which would correspond, from a musical point of view, to the performance of the finale, can be read as an answer to some of the problems raised in the opening sequence, revealing more clearly and directly what will prove to be some of the most important facets of Virginia Woolf’s understanding of music in relation to society and culture in particular, but also by extension, art and literary expression.

The fourth dream-sequence follows a short transition framed by “...” in which, as we have already mentioned in our overview of the story, the narrator pauses and goes back through her dreams to the first dream-sequence and the fish-laden river, thus creating a clear-cut break in the sequence of events:

... The green garden, moonlit pool, lemons, lovers, and fish are all dissolved in the opal sky, across which, as the horns are joined by trumpets and supported by clarions there rise white arches firmly planted on marble pillars... (SQ, 141)

The two ellipses which frame this phrase suggest a silence at this point in the music, a brief pause perhaps before the start of something new, a final movement or a coda rather than a continuation of the third movement as has been thought by many critics. The horn-calls which had disrupted the ending of the third dream-sequence also

109 As Michael Tilmouth has noted, finales have been seen to sum up the work in “an apotheosis, a triumphant outcome of what has gone before”, in particular in nineteenth century symphonies. (Michael Tilmouth, ‘Finale’, Grove Online, op.cit.).
served to prefigure the end of the quartet (and the end of the narrator’s dreams), suggesting that something ominous was about to happen. The Shakespearian love-story which the narrator had been imagining thus fades away, giving place to a new scene of a completely different character from the previous passages. The contrast with the previous dream-sequence is quite marked as the “confusion and chaos” of the duel scene is pictured as being “trod to earth”, smothered by images of order, regularity and symmetry. To the horns, trumpets and clarions are added the (often synonymous) adjectives “trumpeting”, “clang” and “clangour”, a vocabulary frequently assimilated with the sounds of military music. The martial nature of the music is emphasized by the swinging double rhythms and the parallel alliterations, as well as by the evocation of the regular beat of the tramp and tread of cohorts:


If we decode yet again the music from the images, the mention of a “march” as well as the loud brass sounds point to a type of lively but stately finale which sometimes follows the more light-hearted style of a third movement Scherzo, which itself is a movement quite in accordance with the atmosphere of the previous dream-sequence. The music is seen here to express steadfastness and harmony and this is further emphasized by the reference to architecture, the narrator having travelled in mind to a “city” of music. It goes without saying that the architectural model in music is common-place, in particular regarding the music of the classical period such as we have in this short story, a style which is non-representative whilst at the same time relying on the same structural principles of symmetry and proportion. But again, as in the previous dream-sequences, the expression of a positive and triumphant ending is short-lived as the scenes imagined by the narrator are progressively undermined. Very quickly, the initial poise and positivity is superseded by a narrative pervaded by negative connotations: “but”, “neither ... nor”, “nor... nor”, “none”, “no”. “Hope” and “joy” are seen here (literally) to die - “leave then to perish your hope; droop in the

110 cf. OED entry for ‘clangour’: “Loud resonant ringing sound, as of a trumpet, a large bell, pieces of metal struck together, etc.; a clang.”
desert my joy”, leaving only despair, thus echoing the question which the narrator had asked herself during the first interval, “But the tune, like all his tunes, makes one despair – I mean hope. What do I mean?” (SQ, 141) Not only does the physical solidity of the city prove itself to be but an illusion – the city has “neither stone nor marble”, it is bare and desolate - there are no friendly faces nor welcoming flags. It seems to hover in mid-air as it “hangs enduring”, shimmering translucently in the heat, letting through the light and “casting no shade” - a receding mirage in a hostile inhuman desert, intangible, unreachable and to all intents and purposes, dashing any hope of salvation. The negative ending of ‘The String Quartet’ is thus particularly strange and ambiguous as the narrator suddenly appears to lose heart, putting the whole of her musical experience into question, “desiring only to go” and leave the concert hall as quickly as possible.

Interestingly, Werner Wolf places the end of the quartet’s performance at the phrase “confusion and chaos trod to earth”, symbolizing a final conclusive chord affirming the tonic, thus taking the passage focusing on the “city” as “a recapitulation of the everyday frame”, the “Mozart sounds still linger[ing] in the protagonist’s mind”. Even though Wolf notes the negative ending, he puts this down to the “dawning consciousness of her and the other concert-goers’ real situation” which “undermines the positivity triggered by the imaginative reception of the music”. For him, the immaterial city is not part of the dream-sequence but is in fact London itself, as the narrator walks home:

If shortly before, the protagonist still had a vision of a fantastic marble city, in which the entering cortège was solemnly welcomed, her thoughts, gradually switching to actual London, now take quite a different turn.

We would however strongly question Werner Wolf’s delineation of the ending of the musical performance in ‘The String Quartet’ and place the ending of the quartet’s performance at the word “severe”, far more logical from a consistent narrative point of view. There is indeed nothing to warrant a break in any other place of this dream-

113 ibid.
114 ibid.
sequence. On the contrary, it seems quite clear that the end of the concert is strongly marked by the start of a new narrative focus as the narrator falls back in her chair when the concert ends, drained by her experience, only thinking about returning home but certainly not actually walking home in this passage, as Wolf suggests:

back then I fall, eager no more, desiring only to go, find the street, mark the buildings, greet the applewoman, say to the maid who opens the door: A starry night. (SQ, 141)

The last dialogue points to the fact that the concert-goers are still leaving the hall and the narrator is parting with her friends as they go in different directions:

‘Good night, good night. You go this way?’
‘Alas. I go that.’ (SQ, 141)

Furthermore, the concrete/abstract pattern which emerged quite consistently in each of the previous dream-sequences and which we perceive in this passage as well, only makes sense if we consider that the final mirage is part of the dream-sequence. Indeed, as in all previous cases, the scene undergoes a subversive metamorphosis from concrete to abstract, from solid to fluid, from opaque to transparent.

If we consider the apparent despair of the ending of ‘The String Quartet’ being a part of the dream-sequence and therefore directly linked to the music which is still, in fact, being performed at that moment, it has a bearing upon the narrator’s attempt at fictionalizing the music (and therefore on Woolf’s own understanding of the musicalization of fiction) rather than being simply the token of a pessimistic view of the civilization “outside” the realm of the music, which is Werner Wolf’s interpretation of this passage. Even though “hope” and “joy” perish and droop, this immaterial city is still characterized with positive adjectives, in particular the word “resplendent”. Throughout Virginia Woolf’s literary criticism, the metaphor of the “barren desert” is in fact far from being a negative image but is consistently linked with the task which the modern novelists have to face in order to revive the artistic potential of the novel. In her essay ‘Modern Fiction’, Virginia Woolf will strongly criticise the style of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, authors whom she found fell short of their vision, showing us only “what they might have done” but did not do, “catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side”. Above all, it is the false feeling
of "solidity" which Virginia Woolf deplores the most, from the skills of Mr Bennett's craftsmanship, to the steadfastness of Mr Well’s "ideas and facts", the all-pervading "realism" which underpins Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett thus failing to capture the movement and energy of "life itself" (E4: 161):

If we fasten, then, one label on all these books, on which is one word materialists, we mean by it that they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring. (‘Modern Fiction’, E4: 159)

What is of even more significance is that using the metaphor of the barren desert in a positive manner, Virginia Woolf will assert that

it is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul. (E4: 158)

For Woolf, the choice of this image reflects the difficulty of the task ahead and the pioneering spirit which she felt in the novelists of the future, herself included.

The ending of the String Quartet is therefore far from being a negative experience. "Hope" and "joy", in the desert to which the narrator advances, appear all the more transitory in the light of the "enduring", "unshakable", "resplendent" and "severe" immaterial city. They were but emotional props, fleeting and finally insignificant. The musical experience of the narrator thus brings to light the trivial nature of these emotions, mere "sentiments", and the narrator finds herself in the end faced with something far more significant, the intensity of which gets her sitting on the edge of her chair. At this point, the narrative focus changes and the narrator does not seem to control the story she is making up in the same way as before. Her dream of a beautiful city rising on the horizon in the dawn is shattered as she realizes how futile and insignificant her dreams had been compared to her actual experience of the music. Her levels of consciousness split as she becomes here again the spectator of her dreaming self, speaking to her imagination – "leave then to perish your hope", "droop in the desert my joy" (SQ, 141, my italics), until finally, she finds herself
stripped of all the superficial layers of representation to advance "naked" in the desert, leaving words and images far behind. The final passage reflects not the narrator's roving imagination as she listens to the music, but finally puts the music she is hearing in the foreground, away from the superficial tinsel and sparkle of the imaginary (and unmusical) stories, a more difficult experience to express and one that is far more significant. After falling back into her chair at the close of the concert, the narrator is exhausted and drained from her intense musical experience, but her thoughts of London are far from negative. On the contrary, the music has made her want to go back into the world which she now perceives in its simplicity – the applewoman and the maid reminiscent of the simple laughing fishwives of the music of the first dream-sequence, "find the street, mark the buildings, greet the applewoman, say to the maid who opens the door: A starry night" (SQ, 141). The final musical experience does indeed put into question the narrator's original response to the music, just as, as we have seen, the underlying subversion in each of the other dream-sequences put into question the more superficial or sentimental original responses. The final dream-sequence however goes one step further and leads the narrator into the unknown aesthetic territory of the desert landscape. Music is thus understood in this passage in terms of transcendence, a form of artistic expression which goes beyond the physical world to reveal its very essence.

(ii) Musical transcendence

- The musical space in the Woolfian landscape

The 'String Quartet' was undoubtedly reworked by Virginia Woolf to feature in The Waves, in a passage with which it bears striking similarities. Both texts, read in parallel, shed light on each other. Both Rhoda in The Waves and the narrator in 'The String Quartet' are finally dissatisfied with their original imaginative response to the music. Rhoda, after Percival's death, finds solace by going to a concert in the Bechstein Hall but is frustrated at not being able to express in words her musical experience:
Then the beetle-shaped men come with their violins; wait; count; nod; down come their bows. And there is ripple and laughter like the dance of olive trees and their myriad-tongued grey leaves when a seafarer, biting a twig between his lips where the many-backed steep hills come down, leaps on shore.

"Like" and "like" and "like" — but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? (W, 116)

Though Rhoda’s imaginative response draws on different images from those of ‘The String Quartet’s’ narrator, and the passage itself is shorter and more concise, the same progression from the literary representation of music (the hills covered in olive trees, the seafarer jumping ashore, etc.) to hearing the music in itself (the “things that lies beneath the semblance of the thing”) occurs in Rhoda’s musical experience in The Waves.

Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling-place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation. (W, 116)

As in ‘The String Quartet’, the music in The Waves is finally seen to create its own transcendent space. ‘The String Quartet’ is not about the vivid depiction of leaping fish and raging torrents but about the energy and motion which the music suggests and which the narrator can only describe metaphorically. It is about the incommensurable fusion of a complex and unnamed emotion behind the moonlit river trip, it is the expression of tension between two contrasting genders behind the romantic story between a lady and her lover, and finally, it is the abstract pattern of a fluid architecture of sound, behind the visions of the firm marble pillars of a great city, or, if we return to The Waves, it is Rhoda’s miraculous vision of an oblong placed upon the square.115

115 Interestingly, in her essay ‘Phases of Fiction’, Woolf will use the same image of “dwelling-place” to describe the metaphorical “space” of novels, the mind “making itself a dwelling-place” in them
Though Woolf does not bring music into play at that point, a scene from Jacob’s Room which Virginia Woolf had been writing at the same time as ‘The String Quartet’ nevertheless gives us a further insight into the significance of Virginia Woolf’s use of the architectural metaphor in ‘The String Quartet’ to represent the narrator’s final musical experience. In Jacob’s Room, the narrator will reflect upon the transiency of human life and the nature of beauty and eternity, when, in a moment of revelation the essence of life is revealed as he gazes upon the outline of the pillars of the Acropolis in Athens:

But who, save the nerve-worn and sleepless, or thinkers standing with hands to the eyes on some crag above the multitude, see things thus in skeleton outline, bare of flesh? In Surbiton the skeleton is wrapped in flesh. (JR, 162)

In one of the last scenes of the novel, the perspective of the whole passage is viewed as if through the wrong end of a telescope as the characters of Jacob and Sandra, on holiday in Greece, are depicted so small in the distance, gradually vanishing up the hill, leaving us with only the towering shape of the Acropolis, the white “columns” of the Parthenon reminiscent of the bare sea-washed bones of the sheep’s skull, “clean, white, wind-swept, sand-rubbed” (JR, 9), which Jacob had found lying on the beach, a token of our own mortality:

But to return to Jacob and Sandra.

when it reads (CE2: 57). The same idea occurs in her diary: writing in March 1930 about her conception of The Waves, she will reflect that the test of a book (to a writer) [is] if it makes a space in which, quite naturally, you can say what you want to say. As this morning I could say what Rhoda said. This proves that the book itself is alive: because it has not crushed the thing I wanted to say, but allowed me to slip it in, without any compression or alteration (D3: 297-298)

116 so much so that a draft of the manuscript of the ending of ‘The String Quartet’ is located within the manuscript of Jacob’s Room – see Susan Dick, editor’s note to ‘The String Quartet’, SF, p. 301.

117 The architectural metaphor will recur in many of Woolf’s novels in relation to musical performance. In The Voyage Out, for instance, a three-dimensional vision of a building will be conjured up in the minds of the listeners as Rachel plays a Bach fugue:

Rachel, though robbed of her audience, had gone on playing to herself. From John Peel she passed to Bach, who was at this time the subject of her intense enthusiasm, and one by one some of the younger dancers came in from the garden and sat upon the deserted gilt chairs round the piano, the room being now so clear that they turned out the lights. As they sat and listened, their nerves were quieted; the heat and soreness of their lips, the result of incessant talking and laughing, was smoothed away. They sat very still as if they saw a building with spaces and columns succeeding each other rising in the empty space. (VO, 165)

We have spoken elsewhere of the “visibility” of sound in Mrs Dalloway (Mrs D, 76-77), to which we could also add the recurring motif of the “leaden circles” of Big Ben’s “musical” bells (Mrs D, 6).

118 see also Virginia Woolf’s own observations during her trip to Greece in 1906 (PA, 321-329).
They had vanished. There was the Acropolis; but had they reached it? The columns and the Temple remain; the emotion of the living breaks fresh on them year after year; and of that what remains?

As for reaching the Acropolis who shall say that we ever do it, or that when Jacob woke next morning he found anything hard and durable to keep for ever? (JR, 160)

In a similar way to the experience of music contained in ‘The String Quartet’, the transiency of human emotions and life are brought to light in the face of the bare and severe architecture of the Acropolis which comes to symbolize the eternal nature of the “thing which lies beneath the semblance of the thing” (W, 116), leading in this passage to Jacob’s heightened sense of “disillusionment” with the superficial nature of the “business” of life which serves to occupy our minds and lives as each one of us is compared to a scuttling “insect”,

each insect carries a globe of the world in his head, and the webs of the forest are schemes evolved for the smooth conduct of business; and honey is treasure of one sort and another; and the stir in the air is the indescribable agitation of life. (JR, 162)

As Jacob sits facing the Erechtheum gazing at a group of rowdy tourists, the “elegant trifles” and “sentimental devotions” which make up the “mud” of human emotions appear dwarfed into insignificance:119

There they are again, the pillars, the pediment, the Temple of Victory and the Erechtheum, set on a tawny rock cleft with shadows, directly you unlatch your shutters in the morning and, leaning out, hear the clatter, the clamour, the whip cracking in the street below. There they are.

The extreme definiteness with which they stand, now a brilliant white, again yellow, and in some lights red, imposes ideas of durability, of the emergence through the earth of some spiritual energy elsewhere dissipated in elegant trifles. But this durability exists quite independently of our admiration. Although the beauty is sufficiently humane to waken us, to stir the deep deposit of mud—memories, abandonments, regrets, sentimental devotions—the Parthenon is separate from all that; and if you consider how it has stood out all night, for centuries, you begin to connect the blaze (at midday the

119 “Ladies with green and white umbrellas passed through the courtyard. [...] Jacob wrote; began to draw a straight nose; when all the French ladies opening and shutting their umbrellas just beneath him exclaimed, looking at the sky, that one did not know what to expect—rain or fine weather? “How they spoil things,” he murmured, leaning against one of the pillars, pressing his book tight between his arm and his side” (JR, 149-150). This passage is very similar in tone to the conversations dramatized in the opening scene of ‘The String Quartet’, which we shall study in more detail below.
glare is dazzling and the frieze almost invisible) with the idea that perhaps it is beauty alone that is immortal. (JR, 147-148)

In Jacob's Room, those human emotions which had appeared to be the be-all and end-all of life itself turn out after all to be all the more fleeting in contrast with the immortality of beauty itself in its conceptual sense, which takes on the nature of a dazzling abstract light as even the representative “frieze” of statues becomes obliterated in the glare. Virginia Woolf will speak of this elusive “essence” of life in terms of light and energy in one of her diary entries:

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world - this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change, one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive and continuous we human beings, and show the light through. But what is the light? (D3: 218, 4 January 1929)

Is this an echo of the Keatsian notion that the physical world itself passes and dissolves whilst only the “spiritual energy” remains, a sense of everlasting “being” which is revealed momentarily in the frozen silent dance of the silent Greek maidens on a Grecian urn, the bare inhuman columns of the Parthenon in Jacob's Room, Rhoda's perfect “dwelling-place” in The Waves, or, to return to 'The String Quartet', the “enduring”, “unshakable” and significantly inhuman (or should one rather say “a-human”?!) city of music, because they stand unseeing and unfeeling, because they are “separate” from the mud of sentimental emotions which clutter our lives and obscure the truth? The effect of the music in both Rhoda’s concert in The Waves and in ‘The String Quartet’, is thus quasi-cathartic as the first sentimental responses and “silly” emotions are sharply put into question in the face of a much more significant aesthetic experience, one in which we have intimations of the “thing beneath the semblance of the thing”, or in the words of Keats, an experience in which “beauty is truth, truth

120 As Woolf once noted in her diary, “I detest more & more interruption; & the slow heaviess of physical life, & almost dislike peoples bodies, I think, as I grow older; & want always to cut that short, & get my utmost fill of the marrow, of the essence.” (D3: 189)
121 see above, JR, 147.
beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”.\textsuperscript{122} Rhoda thus “parted the boughs of music and saw the house we have made; the square stood upon the oblong. ‘The house which contains all,’ I said (\textit{W}, 146). Virginia Woolf once tried to describe in February 1926, the effect of such a moment of revelation in which the world, in a moment of heightened perception, seems distilled to its very essence:

Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on & say “This is it?” My depression is a harassed feeling – I’m looking; but that’s not it – thats not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? Then (as I was walking through Russell Sqr last night) I see the mountains in the sky; the great clouds; & the moon which is risen over Persia; I have a great & astonishing sense of something there, which is ‘it’ – It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfacotry; achieved. A sense of my own strangeness, walking on the earth is there too: of the infinite oddity of the human position; trotting along Russell Sqr with the moon up there, & those mountain clouds. Who am I, what am I, & so on: these questions are always floating about in me; & then I bump against some exact fact – a letter, a person, & come to them again with a great sense of freshness. And so it goes on. But, on this showing which is true, I think, I do fairly frequently come upon this ‘it’; & then feel quite at rest. (\textit{D3}: 62-63)

Just as Jacob’s experience of looking at the glare of the Parthenon gave his outlook an “extraordinary edge”,\textsuperscript{123} Rhoda’s musical experience in \textit{The Waves} had an effect of revelation, something which “liberates understanding”:

The sweetness of this content overflowing runs down the walls of my mind, and liberates understanding. Wander no more, I say; this is the end. The oblong has been set upon the square; the spiral is on top. We have been hauled over the shingle, down to the sea. (\textit{W}, 116)

Similarly, in ‘The String Quartet’, the music makes the narrator see the world anew, “exciting”, “strange”, “pleasing” (\textit{SQ}, 140).

\textsuperscript{122} John Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, lines 49-50, \url{http://www.bartleby.com/101/625.html}
\textsuperscript{123} In \textit{Jacob’s Room}, even the bones of the sheep’s skull turn eventually to dust, “the sea holly would grow through the eye-sockets; it would turn to powder, or some golfer, hitting his ball one fine day, would disperse a little dust” (\textit{JR}, 9), and the Parthenon after all was “in ruins” whereas Jacob felt “alive”: “And then looking up and seeing the sharp outline, his meditations were given an extraordinary edge; Greece was over; the Parthenon in ruins; yet there he was.” (\textit{JR}, 149)
That music suggests visions of a translucent immaterial architecture pervades Woolf's fiction. As we have already mentioned elsewhere, Virginia Woolf felt a quasi-mystical attraction to music, finding these "pure simple notes" "flawless as gems" and "smooth from all passion and frailty": "Do you know that sound has shape and colour and texture as well?" (L1: 323-324) will she remark to her friend Violet Dickinson. In her 1909 article on Wagner's music, Virginia Woolf will describe Bayreuth as the place of pilgrimage it had by then become, to which the concert-goers had come, "pilgrims many of them from distant lands, [to] attend with all their power" ('Impressions at Bayreuth', E1: 289). The unearthly aerial quality of the music is emphasized as it becomes itself expressive of the Holy Grail which the knights of Parsifal are searching for. As the musical pilgrims are metaphorically plunged into a pool of music, "scarcely stir[ing] until the last wave of sound has ceased", any noise causing "a nervous shudder, like a ripple in water" to run through "the entire house" ('Impressions at Bayreuth', E1: 289), the music of Wagner is also seen to carry them up, "floating" and "soaring" into uncircumscribed regions "where in the beginning he could scarcely breathe" (E1: 290), bringing into play an analogy of a musical wave buoying the audience up into the comfort and security of a world of dreams and make-believe. After one of Woolf's fictional performances of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde in Jacob's Room in which "two thousand hearts in the semi-darkness remembered, anticipated, travelled dark labyrinths" (JR, 67), Jacob's friend, Richard Bonamy, will leave the opera-house "as if he were still set a little apart from his fellows by the influence of the music" (JR, 68). In the essay, 'The Opera', published in The Times, in April 1909, Virginia Woolf, beneath a veneer of bantering humour and acute social satire, reveals her perceptive understanding of the rituals of the operatic establishment, referring here in particular to the absurd disparity between the Covent Garden market and Covent Garden Opera House itself, a "great dome which has risen so pompously among the cabbages and slums", which "shelters one of the oddest of all worlds – brilliant, beautiful and absurd" (E1: 272). She will return again and again to this in her novels. In The Years, Kitty Lasswade will go to hear Wagner, and note most particularly the discrepancy between the market outside where "at dawn, at Covent Garden, [...] tables and trestles, even the cobbles were frilled as with some celestial laundry with cabbages, cherries and carnations" (Y, 138), and the closed world of the opera, emphasizing the inherent dichotomy between these two contradictory spaces:
The car slowed down. It had to take its place in the long line of cars that moved at a foot’s pace, now stopping dead, now jerking on, down the narrow street, blocked by market carts, that led to the Opera House. Men and women in full evening dress were walking along the pavement. They looked uncomfortable and self-conscious as they dodged between costers’ barrows, with their high piled hair and their evening cloaks; with their button-holes and their white waistcoats, in the glare of the afternoon sun. The ladies tripped uncomfortably on their high-heeled shoes; now and then they put their hands to their heads. The gentlemen kept close beside them as though protecting them. It’s absurd, Kitty thought; it’s ridiculous to come out in full evening dress at this time of day. She leant back in her corner. Covent Garden porters, dingy little clerks in their ordinary working clothes, coarse-looking women in aprons stared in at her. The air smelt strongly of oranges and bananas. (Y, 194-195)

As Kitty enters the Opera House, the atmosphere changes at once:

She pushed through the glass doors and went in. She felt at once a sense of relief. Now that the daylight was extinguished and the air glowed yellow and crimson, she no longer felt absurd. On the contrary, she felt appropriate. The ladies and gentlemen who were mounting the stairs were dressed exactly as she was. The smell of oranges and bananas had been replaced by another smell — a subtle mixture of clothes and gloves and flowers that affected her pleasantly. The carpet was thick beneath her feet. She went along the corridor till she came to her own box with the card on it. She went in and the whole Opera House opened in front of her. (Y, 195)

In *The Waves*, Rhoda will compare the audience of a concert in the Bechstein Hall to “walruses, stranded on rocks, like heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea, hoping for a wave to lift us, but we are too heavy, and too much dry shingle lies between us and the sea” (*W*, 115), the sea being the music. In the ball-scene in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf will compare the music to that of the pied-piper of Hamelin, irresistibly beckoning the dancers to join in the waltz:

After a few minutes’ pause, the father, the daughter, and the son-in-law who played the horn flourished with one accord. Like the rats who followed the piper, heads instantly appeared in the doorway. There was another flourish; and then the trio dashed spontaneously into the triumphant swing of the waltz. It was as though the room were
instantly flooded with water. After a moment’s hesitation first one couple, then another, leapt into mid-steam, and went round and round in the eddies. (VO, 150)

In a similar manner, in *The Waves*, the singer will become a mermaid as “swollen but contained in slippery satin, the seagreen woman comes to our rescue” (*W*, 115). Thus, when one hears music, one “must always rise and follow” (*E1*: 29), give oneself to its sway and “cluster like maggots on the back of something that will carry us on” (*W*, 115).

Woolf often describes music in terms of this otherworldly space, a transcendent imaginative place for which people will even pay money to travel to, as Woolf will marvel at in her essay ‘Street Music’: “There is an audience, in short, who is willing to pay for even such crude melody as this”(*E1*, 27). Rhoda will wonder at this in *The Waves* as she walks past the Wigmore Hall, “here is a hall where one pays money and goes in, where one hears music among somnolent people who have come here after lunch on a hot afternoon” (*W*, 115). Music is thus strongly associated with the notion of dreams and make-believe because it has no practical use but that of pure imaginative enjoyment – unlike literature or painting, it conveys neither information nor can it represent “some tangible object”, as Woolf humorously argued in her essay ‘Street Music’ (*E1*: 28). The imaginary musical space is thus repeatedly linked in the web of Woolfian analogies with images of depth, water and glass. In Virginia Woolf’s short story ‘Moments of Being: “Slater’s Pins have no Points”’, the pin which held a rose pinned to Fanny Wilmot’s dress came loose and fell onto the floor along with the flower during a lesson in which Miss Craye, her piano teacher, was performing a Bach fugue. Miss Craye, having noticed the incident, turned round on her piano stool and, possibly before even striking the final chord, remarked very prosaically that “Slater’s pins have no points – don’t you always find that?” giving her pupil a sudden shock as her voice broke through the wash of music:

Fanny stooped with her ears full of the music, to look for the pin on the floor.
The words gave her an extraordinary shock, as Miss Craye struck the last chord of the Bach fugue. (*SF*, 215)
The shock came less from the actual sound of the voice after the piano but from the fact that for Fanny, Miss Craye lived in a (musical) world of her own which seemed far removed from everyday business such as buying pins:124

did Miss Craye actually go to Slater’s and buy pins then, Fanny Wilmot asked herself, transfixed for a moment? Did she stand at the counter waiting like anybody else, and was she given a bill with coppers wrapped in it, and did she slip them into her purse and then, an hour later, stand by her dressing table and take out the pins? What need had she of pins? For she was not so much dressed as cased, like a beetle compactly in its sheath, blue in winter, green in summer. What need had she of pins – Julia Craye – who lived, it seemed, in the cool, glassy world of Bach fugues. (SF, 215)

The pins themselves become the symbol of the superficial life which women lead (needing pins to hold roses on to their dresses) which Miss Craye had seemed to escape through her music, the “cool glassy world of Bach fugues”, a still transparent watery world far from the hot fret, worries and conventions of day to day life.

The musical space in Virginia Woolf’s works is thus paradoxical. It is both transcendent and aerial or described in terms of oceans and pools of music, a watery world apart from reality, a world in which one is totally submerged. But above all, it is a space in which our usual bearings are put into question and which even the most “transparent” of metaphors and images fail to describe with any satisfaction. It is a space not only beyond words but also beyond our very sight. In all cases, it is in the Woolfian imaginary landscape a dangerous world in which one also feels one is on the verge of suffocation and death because it removes us from the false safety of a world of “reality” and “facts”, a world which finally proves itself to be shallow and unsatisfactory.

- The retreat from the “horror of human intercourse”: music vis à vis society in The Voyage Out

Virginia Woolf, in her own life, often associated listening or playing music with the notion of retreat from the real prosaic everyday world, away from the drudge of what she will call later the “cotton-wool of daily life” (‘A Sketch of the Past’, MB,

124 Even her pianist’s hands are adorned with “water-coloured rings set in pearls” (SF, 217).
73). Reflecting on her being a writer, whose raw material, everyday words, do not enable her to withdraw from daily life, as musicians (and, to a certain extent, painters) can, Woolf was led to ask whether their world was “happier”\(^{125}\) than the writer's world and she will thus envy her sister, a painter:

As a painter, I believe you are much less conscious of the drone of daily life than I am, as a writer. You are a painter. I think a good deal about you, for purposes of my own, and this seems to me clear. This explains your simplicity. What have you to do with all this turmoil? What you want is a studio where you can see things. (L1: 475)

In 1925, the year Mrs Dalloway was published, music was, for Woolf, a way to escape the world of “human beings” which had grown “too complicated” and, perhaps, not sincere enough, as she wished to “live the life of a badger, nocturnal, secretive, no dinings out” and simply have “one great gala night a month” where her guests would have come in all their bare simplicity, “unmixed, undressed, unpowdered”, and where music would have broken the “horror of human intercourse”, thus achieving an intimacy between the guests which is never usually attained in conventional parties. Writing to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf will outline her project of creating such a musical “salon”:

I’m going to live the life of a badger, nocturnal, secretive, no dinings out, or gallivantings, but alone in my burrow at the back. [...] And then I’m going this winter to have one great gala night a month: The studio will be candle lit, rows of pink, green, and blue candles, and a long table laid with jugs of chocolate and buns. Everybody will be discharged into this room, unmixed, undressed, unpowdered. You will emerge like a lighthouse, fitful, sudden, remote (Now that is rather like you) This way of seeing people might be gigantically successful, and then your cousin has lent me his piano, and I intend to break up the horror of human intercourse with music. (L3:198)

\(^{125}\) Hot, hot, hot. Record heat wave, record summer if we kept records this summer. At 2.30 a plane zooms: 10 minutes later air raid sounds: 20 later, all clear. Hot, I repeat; and doubt if I'm a poet. H.P. hard labour. Brain w- no, I can't think of the word - yes, wilts. An idea. All writers are unhappy. The picture of the world in books is thus too dark. The wordless are the happy: women in cottage gardens: Mrs. Chavasse. Not a true picture of the world; only a writer's picture. Are musicians, painters, happy? Is their world happier? (D5: 315, 5 September 1940)
She will return to this aspect in her works. In *The Voyage Out* in particular, the tension between the world of music and that of human society is one of the motivating themes of the novel. Nowhere more than in *The Voyage Out* does Virginia Woolf analyse in greater detail through the character of Rachel the role music plays *vis à vis* society.

Indeed, when Rachel’s musical skill became more than just a pastime and an accomplishment, she was highly criticised by her friends and family: “She’s a nice quiet girl, devoted to her music—a little less of *that* would do no harm” (*VO*, 83). Clarissa Dalloway will assert, “I don’t think music’s altogether good for people—I’m afraid not”, then asking Rachel, “when you see a musician with long hair, don’t you know instinctively that he’s bad?” (*VO*, 44). In such a way, in one of Woolf’s more satirical passages, her aunts will worry about the effect of practising the piano on the shape of her arms and her future prospects:

> “I heard from Aunt Bessie not long ago,” Helen stated. “She is afraid that you will spoil your arms if you insist upon so much practising.”
> “The muscles of the forearm—and then one won’t marry?”
> “She didn’t put it quite like that,” replied Mrs. Ambrose.
> “Oh, no—of course she wouldn’t,” said Rachel with a sigh.” (*VO*, 16)

In *Three Guineas*, a political feminist pamphlet, Woolf will develop the point:126

---

126 Women composers and musicians were probably the most discriminated against of all women artists, as Woolf will point out in *A Room of One’s Own*:

> There would always have been that assertion—you cannot do this, you are incapable of doing that—to protest against, to overcome. Probably for a novelist this germ is no longer of much effect; for there have been women novelists of merit. But for painters it must still have some sting in it; and for musicians, I imagine, is even now active and poisonous in the extreme. The woman composer stands where the actress stood in the time of Shakespeare. Nick Greene, I thought, remembering the story I had made about Shakespeare’s sister, said that a woman acting put him in mind of a dog dancing. Johnson repeated the phrase two hundred years later of women preaching. And here, I said, opening a book about music, we have the very words used again in this year of grace, 1928, of women who try to write music. “Of Mlle. Germaine Tailferre one can only repeat Dr Johnson’s dictum concerning, a woman preacher, transposed into terms of music. “Sir, a woman’s composing is like a dog’s walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all.” [ft. ref., *A Survey of Contemporary Music*, Cecil Gray, P. 246] So accurately does history repeat itself. (*ROO*, 70-71)

This echoes a passage from *The Voyage Out* when Terence Hewet quite unfairly comments to Rachel who is practising a difficult figuration in her Beethoven sonata that: “I’ve no objection to nice simple tunes—indeed, I find them very helpful to my literary composition, but that kind of thing is merely like an unfortunate old dog going round on its hind legs in the rain.” (*VO*, 297). Needless to say, Rachel retorts that “No, Terence, it’s no good; here am I, the best musician in South America, not to speak of Europe and Asia, and I can’t play a note because of you in the room interrupting me every other second.” (*VO*, 297).
Marriage, of course. '... it was not a question of whether we should marry, but simply
of whom we should marry,' says one of them. It was with a view to marriage that her
mind was taught. It was with a view to marriage that she tinkled on the piano, but was
not allowed to join an orchestra; sketched innocent domestic scenes, but was not
allowed to study from the nude; read this book, but was not allowed to read that,
charmed, and talked. It was with a view to marriage that her body was educated; a maid
was provided for her; that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her;
that solitude was denied her—all this was enforced upon her in order that she might
preserve her body intact for her husband. In short, the thought of marriage influenced
what she said, what she thought, what she did. How could it be otherwise? Marriage
was the only profession open to her. (TG, 206)

Indeed, "few parents", Woolf will complain, "are willing that their sons should
become painters or poets or musicians" (‘Street Music’ E1:28) since it seems that is
the musician’s occupation is the “the least useful and necessary” (E1: 29): “one
notices it at once when a boy or girl takes up music as a profession.” (VO, 44), will
say Mrs Dalloway, whom, it may be remembered, Woolf will later characterize in
Mrs Dalloway as a musical “prig” (Mrs D, 194). In Night and Day, Henry Otway is
described as an eccentric fall-out from society who had wasted his life by choosing
music over a career in shipping, a failed composer who has never achieved anything
worthwhile in music and “who found himself in financial difficulties, which forced
him to the uncongenial occupation of teaching the young ladies of Bungay to play
upon the violin” (ND, 96):

Henry was the eldest of the younger group, and their leader; he bought strange books
and joined odd societies; he went without a tie for a whole year, and had six shirts made
of black flannel. He had long refused to take a seat either in a shipping office or in a
tea–merchant’s warehouse; and persisted, in spite of the disapproval of uncles and
aunts, in practicing both violin and piano, with the result that he could not perform
professionally upon either. Indeed, for thirty–two years of life he had nothing more
substantial to show than a manuscript book containing the score of half an opera. (ND,
194)

In The Voyage Out, Richard Dalloway will criticise artists for their lack of political
engagement, for this uselessness, the way they always seem to be on the outskirts of
society and civilization: “Now your artists find things in a mess, shrug their shoulders,
turn aside to their visions—which I grant may be very beautiful—and leave things in a mess” (VO, 40) whilst his wife Clarissa Dalloway will complain similarly of music that it is cut off from the “real” world, a world of poverty, pain and suffering towards which society has a duty:

“It’s dreadful,” said Mrs. Dalloway, who, while her husband spoke, had been thinking. “When I’m with artists I feel so intensely the delights of shutting oneself up in a little world of one’s own, with pictures and music and everything beautiful, and then I go out into the streets and the first child I meet with its poor, hungry, dirty little face makes me turn round and say, ‘No, I can’t shut myself up—I won’t live in a world of my own. I should like to stop all the painting and writing and music until this kind of thing exists no longer.’ (VO, 41)

In such a way, when asked about the women’s vote, Rachel will not find it a very important issue, because she plays the piano:

Do you really think that the vote will do you any good?”

“The vote?” Rachel repeated. She had to visualise it as a little bit of paper which she dropped into a box before she understood his question, and looking at each other they smiled at something absurd in the question.

“Not to me,” she said. “But I play the piano…” (VO, 211)

Repeatedly is Rachel described as being apart, displaced, out of “normal” society because she plays the piano too much:

Rachel, being musical, was allowed to learn nothing but music; she became a fanatic about music. All the energies that might have gone into languages, science, or literature, that might have made her friends, or shown her the world, poured straight into music [...] Helen looked at her. Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes; denied beauty, now that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of colour and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than normally incompetent for her years. (VO, 30)
Rachel thus lives entirely in a world of music, a world populated by her own fantasies. But by playing the piano, Rachel can escape the attentions of her entourage and affirm her own individuality:

To feel anything strongly was to create an abyss between oneself and others who feel strongly perhaps but differently. It was far better to play the piano and forget all the rest. The conclusion was very welcome. Let these odd men and women—her aunts, the Hunts, Ridley, Helen, Mr. Pepper, and the rest—be symbols,—featureless but dignified, symbols of age, of youth, of motherhood, of learning, and beautiful often as people upon the stage are beautiful. (VO, 32)

Only by playing the piano can she isolate herself in a world of her own, whose sincerity and truthfulness relieves her from the poses and masks of society. What Rachel finds so alluring in her music is being able to shut out the world and its problems while she plays, her music room being compared to a sanctuary and a fortress, a world in itself:

Among the promises which Mrs. Ambrose had made her niece should she stay was a room cut off from the rest of the house, large, private—a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. Rooms, she knew, became more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four. Her judgment was correct, and when she shut the door Rachel entered an enchanted place, where the poets sang and things fell into their right proportions. (VO, 121)

She will be particularly distraught as Mrs Dalloway breaks into this sanctuary and interrupts her playing:

Instead of joining them as they began to pace the deck, Rachel was indignant with the prosperous matrons, who made her feel outside their world and motherless, and turning back, she left them abruptly. She slammed the door of her room, and pulled out her music. It was all old music—Bach and Beethoven, Mozart and Purcell—the pages yellow, the engraving rough to the finger. In three minutes she was deep in a very difficult, very classical fugue in A, and over her face came a queer remote impersonal expression of complete absorption and anxious satisfaction. Now she stumbled; now she faltered and had to play the same bar twice over; but an invisible line seemed to string the notes together, from which rose a shape, a building. She was so far absorbed
in this work, for it was really difficult to find how all these sounds should stand together, and drew upon the whole of her faculties, that she never heard a knock at the door. It was burst impulsively open, and Mrs. Dalloway stood in the room leaving the door open, so that a strip of the white deck and of the blue sea appeared through the opening. The shape of the Bach fugue crashed to the ground.

"Don’t let me interrupt," Clarissa implored. “I heard you playing, and I couldn’t resist. I adore Bach!”

Rachel flushed and fumbled her fingers in her lap. She stood up awkwardly. (VO, 53-54)

Rachel’s musical world is thus more real to her than her friends and family – mere symbols, puppets upon a stage, unreal because reality lies elsewhere, in the things which are never said. This echoes Virginia Woolf’s own experience of music in her youth:

Coming back we forgot all our cares - (and they were many - Nessa and I each had a large string bag full of melons which bumped against our knees at every movement) in gazing - absorbing - sinking into the Sky. You dont see the sky until you live here. We have ceased to be dwellers on the earth. We are really made of clouds. We are mystical and dreamy and perform Fugues on the Harmonium. (L1:27)

For Virginia Woolf, music can never be false or conventional, it can never be insincere. To Rachel Vinrace,

It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for. Reality dwelling in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about, one could accept a system in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily to other people, without often troubling to think about it, except as something superficially strange. Absorbed by her music she accepted her lot very complacently, blazing into indignation perhaps once a fortnight, and subsiding as she subsided now. Inextricably mixed in dreamy confusion, her mind seemed to enter into communion, to be delightfully expanded and combined with the spirit of the whitish boards on deck, with the spirit of the sea, with the spirit of Beethoven Op. 111, even with the spirit of poor William Cowper there at Olney. Like a ball of thistledown it kissed the sea, rose, kissed it again, and thus rising and kissing passed finally out of sight. The rising and falling of the ball of thistledown was represented by the sudden
droop forward of her own head, and when it passed out of sight she was asleep. \((VO, 32-33)\)^{127}

As Woolf once noted, "music perhaps because it is not human is the only thing made by men that can never be mean or ugly" \((E1: 31)\). Rachel accepts her life as it is because for her "reality dwell[s] in what one saw and felt, but did not talk about", reality dwells in her world of music which thus expresses a truth beyond the conventions and poses of society, a superficial system "in which things went round and round quite satisfactorily to other people" but not to someone in search of a more lasting and significant experience of life which pierces through the "cotton-wool".

(iii) Music and the search for truth in 'The String Quartet': the pre-concert "orts, scraps and fragments"

What the four-fold metamorphosis from concrete to abstract in each and every one of the dream-sequences of 'The String Quartet' reveals, is the power of music to remove us away from a world of realities into a world of pure abstraction and transcendence and this is never more apparent than if we place the narrator's musical experience back into the context of the short story as a whole, itself part of a larger aesthetic and literary project.

Taking into account the aesthetic framework of Woolf's collection of short stories in which 'The String Quartet' was published, \textit{Monday or Tuesday}, is particularly helpful. The stories which form \textit{Monday or Tuesday}, even though totally independent one from the other, are all part of the same aesthetic project, each one being an illustration of Virginia Woolf's innovative approach to the consciousness, literature and prose.\(^{128}\) She wrote in February 1920 that she "conceive[s] mark on the

---

\(^{127}\) I have corrected the reference to Beethoven's piano sonata op. 111 which in the first English edition appeared erroneously as op. 112. Virginia Woolf later corrected this to op. 111 for the American edition. See \textit{L2: 418}

\(^{128}\) Inspired by the success of her first three stories, 'The Mark on the Wall' (1917), 'Kew Gardens' (1919) and 'An Unwritten Novel' (1920), Virginia Woolf decided to publish a whole collection of short stories which would include these three plus five new ones. The order of the stories is as follows:

1. A Haunted House
2. A Society
3. Monday or Tuesday
4. An Unwritten Novel
Thus, far from being a random selection of short stories, all the stories are in fact connected by an underlying theme, i.e. the expression of a fundamental dissatisfaction with life, in particular life as it is understood in fictional accounts of life. This is a consequence of Woolf’s own search for an elusive “truth” situated beyond the appearances, a search for the true nature not of “reality” but of being, of what Woolf will call “life itself” (E4: 161) and which was her constant preoccupation, hence the questioning not only of what is perceived but also how we perceive it and how we may express it in a search for the answer to the question as to whether language can express the truth, this elusive truth featured for instance in ‘Monday or Tuesday’:

Lazy and indifferent, shaking space easily from his wings, knowing his way, the heron passes over the church beneath the sky. White and distant, absorbed in itself, endlessly the sky covers and uncovers, moves and remains. A lake? Blot the shores of it out! A mountain? Oh, perfect—the sun gold on its slopes. Down that falls. Ferns then, or white feathers, for ever and ever—  

Desiring truth, awaiting it, laboriously distilling a few words, for ever desiring — (a cry starts to the left, another to the right. Wheels strike divergently. Omnibuses conglomerate in conflict) — for ever desiring — (the clock asseverates with twelve distinct strokes that it is midday; light sheds gold scales; children swarm) — for ever desiring truth. Red is the dome; coins hang on the trees; smoke trails from the chimneys; bark, shout, cry “Iron for sale” — and truth? (SF, 137)

The voice in ‘Monday or Tuesday’ is disillusioned with this search for an elusive truth which it can find neither in the lakes, in the mountains and the sunsets, to which so many Romantic poets turned as intimations of eternity and infinity, nor in Modern-day “reality”, the omnibuses, the clocks striking the hours, the noisy children playing in the streets. Similarly, in ‘The Mark on the Wall’, the last story of the collection, the narrator, puzzling over a mark on the wall which might or might not be a snail, or a nail, or a hole, will question our constant desire to find the truth and so doing, will

---

5. The String Quartet
6. Blue & Green
7. Kew Gardens
8. The Mark on the Wall
129 “I’m getting doubtful whether I shall have time to write the story called Monday or Tuesday – if not, I don’t know what to call the book.” (L2: 445)
turn even against modern science and scholarship which is preoccupied only with the superficial “facts” of reality and which fail to discover anything significant:

No, no, nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really – what shall I say? – the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago, which has now, owing to the patient attrition of many generations of housemaids, revealed its head above the coat of paint, and is taking its first view of modern life in the sight of a white-walled fire-lit room, what should I gain? Knowledge? Matter for further speculation? I can think sitting still as well as standing up. And what is knowledge? What are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogating shrew-mice and writing down the language of the stars? And the less we honour them as our superstitions dwindle and our respect for beauty and health of mind increases ... Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one’s thought as a fish slices the water with his fin. (‘The Mark on the Wall’, SF, 86-87)

One of Woolf’s most important essays on the modern literary spirit was first published in the Times Literary Supplement in 1919 under the title ‘Modern Novels’ (E3: 30-37) and was subsequently reworked and modified in order to appear as ‘Modern Fiction’ in The Common Reader in 1925. In the 1925 version, Woolf refers directly to Monday or Tuesday, which had by then been published in the intermediary years. Whereas both essays differ in detail, the underlying argument remains the same. Whilst the 1925 version confirms Woolf’s views, the 1919 article appears like a manifesto for what she was subsequently to put into practise in each and every one of the stories published under the title Monday or Tuesday. In the 1925 version of Modern Fiction, Woolf’s reference to Monday or Tuesday appears in a particularly significant context:

130 as well as itself being a commentary on two short stories she had already written by 1919, ‘The Mark on the Wall’ (1917) and ‘Kew Gardens’ (1919). Even though Kew Gardens was only published in May 1919 – one month after ‘Modern Novels’ appeared in the Times Literary Supplement (on the 10th of April 1919), Virginia Woolf first refers to the story in July 1918 in a letter to Vanessa Bell, and according to Susan Dick, editor of Woolf’s complete shorter fiction, it was possibly even written earlier than that, in August 1917 (cf. SF, 297). ‘An Unwritten Novel’ is first referred to by Woolf in her diary on the 26 January 1920 (D2: 14). It was first published in July 1920 in the London Mercury.
Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this". Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday. ('Modern Fiction', 1925, E4: 160)

Virginia Woolf endeavoured to show that "life" was not a conventional ordering of what was considered "worth" writing about or not, according to some preconceived ideas of what "the proper stuff of fiction" was to be. These short stories were intended to be an experiment in a new art of fiction, one which would be true to life rather than to custom and convention, true to "the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its myriad messages through the brain" rather than to the concepts of "probability or coherence or any other of the handrails to which we cling for support when we set our imaginations free" ('Modern Novels', 1919, E3: 34). Monday or Tuesday is not just a collection of entertaining short stories, it's also a reflection on modern prose-writing, on "life itself" and our perception of life, on the way our consciousness works. In Modern Fiction, Virginia Woolf will ask:

let us record 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. (E4: 161)

In the opening section of the 'The String Quartet', the shower of atoms become showers of arrows. The narrator will be highly aware of the way "each sight or incident" etched its mark upon her consciousness, describing the way the mind is "shot through by such little arrows [...] - for human society compels it — no sooner is one launched than another presses forward". Regent Street, the Treaty, the weather, the influenza, the leak in the larder, the scraps of conversation, etc., all these "facts" penetrate her mind, haphazardly, without any specific aim, without any apparent meaning precisely because they are disconnected from one another, which will lead her to question their significance. The first impression, from the minute the narrator

---

131 to avoid overloading the text, all quotations from the opening of 'The String Quartet' quoted above are from SQ, 138-139.
enters the room is one of an overwhelming "reality", a reality which the narrator considers to be of a superficial nature, which for a minute, makes the narrator herself lose her bearings and forget why she was here in the first place, why she found it necessary to come all the way to the concert, failing to write to the plumber about the leak in the larder and leaving her gloves in the train. The narrator of 'The String Quartet' does admit that she herself is no better than the others, she cannot "boast" because she herself is sitting "passive on a gilt chair", being "acted upon" from the outside. She is playing the same social game as the rest of them on the surface but at the same time, in the opening section, she is a spectator of the rest, echoing Virginia Woolf's own experience of concert-going: "What a queer fate it is — always to be the spectator of the public, never part of it" (D1: 222). Coming to the concert was meant to affirm something, which, as the narrator is swamped by the "facts" of reality, begins to erode, just as the artistic illusion nearly failed in the pageant in Between the Acts, because "reality" was too strong (BA, 210-211):

If the mind's shot through by such little arrows, and—for human society compels it—no sooner is one launched than another presses forward; if this engenders heat and in addition they've turned on the electric light; if saying one thing does, in so many cases, leave behind it a need to improve and revise, stirring besides regrets, pleasures, vanities,

---

132 at the start of the story, the narrator would be at the door of the room, surveying the scene before her eyes, walking through the crowds, shaking hands with acquaintances, until finally finding a seat.

133 See OED online, definition of 'passive': "That is acted upon or is capable of being acted upon from outside; that is the object of action; affected by external force; produced or brought about by external agency, [...] yielding readily to external force or influence." 'Passive' comes from the Latin passivus: "capable of feeling or suffering" (cf. Online Etymology Dictionary, entry for 'passive').

134 In The Waves, Bernard will undergo a similar experience, as thoughts of his forthcoming marriage and the journey to London on the train will set going a series of thoughts revolving round his sense of identity. He will speak of the multitudes of busy people as they rush through the station, off to deal with the necessary but very futile aim of buying hats or keeping appointments, whereas he finds himself stranded above the rest of his fellow passengers, gazing on at them in total detachment, indifferent to the hustle and bustle of the streets, indifferent to the show of life which is but a show and underneath all is "shells, bones and silence":

They are off. They are all impelled by some necessity. Some miserable affair of keeping an appointment, of buying a hat, severs these beautiful human beings once so united. For myself, I have no aim. I have no ambition. I will let myself be carried on by the general impulse. The surface of my mind slips along like a pale-grey stream, reflecting what passes. I cannot remember my past, my nose, or the colour of my eyes, or what my general opinion of myself is. Only in moments of emergency, at a crossing, at a kerb, the wish to preserve my body springs out and seizes me, here, before this omnibus. We insist, it seems, on living. Then again, indifference descends. The roar of the traffic, the passage of undifferentiated faces, this way and that way, drugs me into dreams; rubs the features from faces. People might walk through me. And, what is this moment of time, this particular day in which I have found myself caught? The growl of traffic might be any uproar—forest trees or the roar of wild beasts. Time has whizzed back an inch or two on its reel; our short progress has been cancelled. I think also that our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence. (W, 81)
and desires—if it’s all the facts I mean, and the hats, the fur boas, the gentlemen’s swallow-tail coats, and pearl tie-pins that come to the surface—what chance is there? Of what? It becomes every minute more difficult to say why, in spite of everything, I sit here believing I can’t now say what, or even remember the last time it happened.

(SQ, 138)

The last phrase of this passage is a particularly convoluted phrase which expresses the narrator’s confusion, bewilderment, and perturbed state of mind. The absurdity of her situation is made apparent: the narrator has lost sense of why she can’t say of what there isn’t a chance. In a sort of mise en abyme of the different levels of consciousness, not only can she not remember the point of her question (of what isn’t there a chance?) but she can’t understand why she believes she can’t remember the point of her question. It is as if 1. her not remembering, 2. her “believing” that she can’t remember, which implies that maybe she could remember if only she didn’t “believe” she didn’t, and 3. her questioning why she believes she can’t remember, even though she shows contempt for the superficial social conventions of the concert-hall (which is why she was questioning their truth and value) and had deliberately set out to question the appearances which presented themselves to her, these three levels reflect three different personae, or consciousnesses. But she has no touchstone with which to compare her present state of mind. Time itself is put into question as the narrator finds herself in some kind of timelessness, which has neither past (she can’t remember) nor future (she can’t remember the answer to her question — it’s answer was implied within itself, therefore the question contained its own future answer, which the narrator lost sight of). Finally she cannot remember the last time “it” happened, “it” remaining unspecified. Could this “it” be going beyond the facts? finding the truth? going to a concert? the musical experience? of an existential crisis? Therefore, by questioning her questioning, the narrator ends up by losing her own sense of self. The different levels of consciousness are in complete confusion and the “I” is lost amidst this confusion — implied, suggested within that convoluted sentence, is the question “who am I?”. It is not surprising therefore that even determining the narrator’s gender is problematical. We could assume from clues within the story that

---

135 Awash from the start in “social” time, the narrator is particularly sensitive to the way time is cut up into neat segments which don’t appear to have any meaning because they are given to us illogically without any context (cf. “seven years since we met”, “last time in Venice”, “now”, “the time of year”, “the war”, “late afternoon”, “every minute”).
it is a woman as will do so unquestioningly Peter Jacobs and, with slightly more circumspection, Werner Wolf. In the final “dream-sequence”, there appears to be a kind of *mise en abyme*, where the narrator identifies herself with the fictional woman of her dreams, which Werner Wolf takes as major argument in favour of the narrator being a woman in the first place. But this does not prove beyond doubt that the narrator is in fact of the feminine gender and we may assume that, as in *Orlando*, the narrator has androgynous qualities which transcend both genders. Nothing in a short story is random, and it would seem probable that Virginia Woolf is deliberately obscuring the narrator’s gender. As James Hafley has pointed out concerning the gender of the narrator of ‘A Haunted House’, another of the short stories of the collection *Monday or Tuesday*,

although the narratory voice is “I”, and one of “us”, it is neither masculine nor feminine. And this is the androgenous mind. How far from the mark is a reading that identifies (often without thought) the “I” with a woman because a woman wrote the story – or worse with Virginia Woolf because she wrote it – and then looks to the voice’s subject as to some revelatory “idea” or “message.” Nothing, evidently – not even the explicitly male narrator of *Orlando* – will stop this kind of misreading; and yet of course the only unfortunate consequence is that to read this way is to lose (I surely believe) all the art – to end up with one snail on one wall. A literary escargot.

A second remark concerns the “we” and the “you” uttered by the narrator (“well, here we are, and if you cast your eye over the room [...]”, SQ, 138, my italics). A common procedure in literary conventions, “we” and “you” has two functions: to address the reader directly in order draw us into the story, and to reveal the character’s innermost thoughts, which at this point remain verbalized, therefore communicable to another person (“you”, whoever the “you” may be). Of far more interest however is that it

---

136 Peter Jacobs, *op.cit.*, 243
138 But to return. *He* followed *me* down the corridor, and, as we turned the corner, trod on the lace of my petticoat. What could I do but cry ‘Ah!’ and stop to finger it? (SQ, 140, my italics)
139 For Virginia Woolf, the necessary qualities which a short story must have are concentration, penetration and form (*E3*: 87), cf. David Bradshaw, ‘Introduction’ to *The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.xxvi
shows that the narrator is talking to herself. Indeed, the *mise en abyme* of the different voices of the “self” has fascinated Virginia Woolf and will be an underlying theme in this collection of short stories, from the unarticulated “flight of the mind” to the self actually speaking to itself. In *An Unwritten Novel*, she will ask:

but when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking? — the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world — a coward perhaps, yet somehow beautiful, as it flits with its lantern restlessly up and down the dark corridors. (*SF*, 120)

Virginia Woolf, exploring the different levels of consciousness, gives the narrator in *The String Quartet* an articulate voice, the one which is telling the story, which is her most “conscious”, the voice by which she endeavours to verbalize her thoughts and feelings, the voice of the level of consciousness which is, in fact, the most problematic of all because it is on the border of silence: that of language versus intuitive thought – it is the voice which is both looking inwards at the silence of emotions and thoughts and outwards at voicing this silence. A voice which strangely belongs to a person whom we know not the gender, the age, the appearance, or the life of, a person who doesn’t tell us anything about themselves but for the fact that they possess a consciousness. As a consequence, what we know of them is themselves perceiving. The narrator in *The String Quartet* has no substance – frail and thin, vaporous like those shadows of the soul which have been left behind in the banqueting hall, she is fluid and becomes the receptacle to the facts which pour into her mind, the arrows which shoot through her brain, the showers of atoms which leave mysterious traces on her consciousness which however, in the pre-concert atmosphere, do not make sense and seem totally irrelevant and superficial. But this voice is more than just passive. If it were so, Regent street *would* be up and the Treaty *would* be signed and the passage would read: “they’re saying, that Regent Street is up, and the Treaty is signed; I have forgotten to write about the leak in the larder”, rather than “if indeed it’s true, as they’re saying, that Regent Street is up, and the Treaty signed [...] if I bethink me of having forgotten to write about the leak in the larder”. This voice, by questioning the very facts which are presented to her, becomes a thinking voice (cf. “if I bethink me”), a creative voice, because it is not simply recording the facts, it is telling itself a story, just as the narrator in *An Unwritten Novel*
is writing this unwritten novel in his mind, or as Bernard in *The Waves* is planning his novels as he “speaks” but never getting beyond jotting down a few words in his notebook. In such a way, the narrator, in ‘The String Quartet’, is questioning her own voice(s), the nature of language itself and through this, the voicing of her experience. Just as the narrator loses her self in ‘The String Quartet’, so does Bernard:

‘I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, “Are you hard?” [...] 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”. This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. (W, 204-205)

Bernard in *The Waves*, in the final monologue, will speak of this moment of sudden revelation when what he had thought all his life was life itself suddenly appeared to him as an illusion, a mere shadow of life:

> With dispassionate despair, with entire disillusionment, I surveyed the dust dance; my life, my friends’ lives, and those fabulous presences, men with brooms, women writing, the willow tree by the river—clouds and phantoms made of dust too, of dust that changed, as clouds lose and gain and take gold or red and lose their summits and billow this way and that, mutable, vain. 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? (W, 202-203)

When “light” (metaphorically and symbolically) returned, he saw the world in a different way, “truth” lying elsewhere, in similar experience to that of the narrator in ‘The String Quartet’, as, in her search for the “truth” beyond the dust of the many meanings of the shadows of the words, the substantial world conjured up by the words of her musical make-believe fades and is dissolved into a “new world” without any familiar bearings. Just as Bernard’s words failed to grasp the truth of his experience, blinding him, leading him down familiar but finally untruthful paths, the narrator’s
dreams in ‘The String Quartet’ undergo in each dream-sequence a metamorphosis towards abstraction as she tries to express the essence of life itself which music would seem to express. The narrator’s final reaction to the music – falling back, “eager no more”, will find again an echo in The Waves as Bernard will rise above the details and facts of life and the most common object appears to him transcended, expressive of some mysterious yet beautiful truth:

Now to-night, my body rises tier upon tier like some cool temple whose floor is strewn with carpets and murmurs rise and the altars stand smoking; but up above, here in my serene head, comes only fine gusts of melody, waves of incense, while the lost dove wails, and the banners tremble above tombs, and the dark airs of midnight shake trees outside the open windows. When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread! What shapely spirals the feelings of pears make—how thin, and mottled like some sea-bird’s egg. Even the forks laid straight side by side appear lucid, logical, exact; and the horns of the rolls which we have left are glazed, yellow-plate, hard. I could worship my hand even, with its fan of bones laced by blue mysterious veins and its astonishing look of aptness, suppleness and ability to curl softly or suddenly crush—its infinite sensibility.

‘Immeasurably receptive, holding everything, trembling with fullness, yet clear, contained—so my being seems, now that desire urges it no more out and away; now that curiosity no longer dyes it a thousand colours. It lies deep, tideless, immune, now that he is dead, the man I called “Bernard”, the man who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes—phrases for the moon, notes of features; how people looked, turned, dropped their cigarette ends; under B, butterfly powder, under D, ways of naming death. […]

‘So now, taking upon me the mystery of things, I could go like a spy without leaving this place, without stirring from my chair. […] Light floods the room and drives shadow beyond shadow to where they hang in folds inscrutable. What does the central shadow hold? Something? Nothing? I do not know. (W, 206-207)

In The Waves, Bernard will see the truth, lying not in any transcendent essence – the shadow will remain forever inscrutable, there is no “truth” as such - but in the “effort, effort, effort” of constantly renewing oneself, seeing things afresh, not getting dragged into habits, the constant hauling up onto the shingle and being caught again and pushed back out to sea, in the metaphorical rise and fall of the waves, and life is
in this desire to constantly see beauty in the things in themselves and not get lured by
the veils and shadows, echoes and resonances of “false phrases”.

The external point of view is thus constantly undermined by the searching
subjective voice. Truth and illusion become reversed from the start: what we see,
what we perceive, what we hear, the way we behave in society is “true” as such but
it’s also a lure, it is but the surface of being, it is “catching life just an inch or two on
the wrong side” (‘Modern Fiction’, 1925, E4:159) in the manner of the “realist” novel
so despised by Woolf. The opening of this short story shows that what “comes to the
surface” is absurd, it is the ostentatious clothes of the audience, the dry harsh light of
the illuminated room, the hollow-sounding social small-talk, the conventional poses
(to button or to unbutton one’s gloves...), the bland and polite urbanity of the
audience, those “regrets, pleasures, vanities and desires” - empty useless feelings
which such superficial social interaction create in the mind: what Virginia Woolf will
describe as “the flotsam and jetsam of misery” (L6: 302). The absurdity is conveyed
by the apparent randomness and chaotic appearance of these “facts”, what Woolf will
describe in ‘The Mark on the Wall’, as “the perpetual waste and repair [of life]; all so
casual, all so haphazard...”, “an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world” [...]! A world
not to be lived in.” (SF, 85). In ‘The Mark on the Wall’, the narrator is conscious of
this apparent “disorder” of the “surface” and tries to find a way to go beyond it:

I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciously, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise
from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility,
or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard
separate facts. (‘The Mark on the Wall’, SF, 84-85)

For Virginia Woolf, the only way to transcend the absurdity of the random “facts”
which come to the surface, is, as she will say in ‘A Sketch of the Past’, to discover a
pattern “hidden behind the cotton-wool of daily life”, to discover what makes an
experience whole (MB, 73).

Unconsciousness, which means presumably that the under-mind drowses, is a state we
all know. We all have experience of the work done by unconsciousness in our daily
lives. You have had a crowded day, let us suppose, sightseeing in London. Could you
say what you had seen and done when you came back? Was it not all a blur, a
confusion? But after what seemed a rest, a chance to turn aside and look at something
different, the sights and sounds and saying that had been of most interest to you swam
to the surface, apparently of their own accord; and remained in memory; what was
unimportant sank into forgetfulness. So it is with a writer. After a hard day's work,
trudging round, seeing all he can see, feeling all he can, taking in the book of his mind
innumerable notes, the writer becomes – if he can – unconscious. In fact, his under­
mind works at top speed while his upper-mind drowses. Then, after a pause, the veil
lifts; and there is the thing – the thing he wants to write about – simplified, composed.
(‘The Leaning Tower’, 1940, CE2: 166)

In the posthumously published autobiographical essay, “A Sketch of the Past”,
Virginia Woolf, looking back on her life as a writer, strongly associates music and
literature, in particular in relation to her own works and literary aesthetics. In an
attempt to analyse, explain and justify her need to write, Virginia Woolf brings
together her understanding of music and her modes of writing in the context of what
she rather loosely terms her “conception” or “philosophy” of being, a “philosophy”
which will prove to be woven into the very fabric of her novels. This text is
particularly illuminating as it shows us to what extent and on what levels music plays
a role in her own writings. In a seminal passage which has unsurprisingly been turned
to time and time again in Woolfian studies, the significance of Woolf’s musicality as
it is revealed here has most often than not been overlooked, minimized or
misunderstood. A closer scrutiny of ‘A Sketch of the Past’ will however provide
precious insight into the modalities of Woolf’s musical inspiration and the textual
levels at which they operate.

Virginia Woolf will say that one of the major difficulties she encountered
when she was writing a novel was to describe moments of “non-being” (MB, 70),
“Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by
this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand –
“non-being” (MB, 70), i.e. the moments which we experience “unconsciously” – “one
walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner;
ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner; bookbinding”
(MB, 70), all these events and actions which we forget about the moment they’re
finished with and which she puts into violent contrast with moments of “being”, those
moments which vividly etch themselves in our consciousness and stand out from the
bland routine, the “cotton-wool” of “non-being”, which Virginia Woolf finds makes up so much of our daily life.

As a child then, my days, just as they do now, contained a large proportion of this cotton wool, this non-being. Week after week passed at St Ives and nothing made any dint upon me. Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock; something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life. (MB, 71)

Even though she says she deliberately set out in Night and Day and The Years in particular to blend the moments of being within a texture or discourse of “non-being”, she admits that she has “never been able to do both” (MB, 70) because it is these moments of being, these “shocks” she experiences in real life, rather than the wash of “non-being”, which truly fascinate her and which underpin her writing:

I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. (MB, 72)

These intense emotional “shocks” or “blows” she experiences periodically reveal to her momentarily a transcendent, unified and harmonified vision of what she otherwise perceives as an otherwise pale two dimensional, fractured and complex world. In writing, Woolf tries to capture the way the disparate and disjointed come “together”. The flower, which Virginia Woolf beheld one day in St Ives as a child, appeared to her in such a moment of being as a whole, something which was fundamentally blended together not only with the surrounding world but with her own being and experience of it as well:
I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; “That is the whole”, I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. [...] when I said about the flower ‘That is whole,’ I felt that I had made a discovery. (MB, 71-72)

It is important to note that Woolf does not seek to give a meaning to this moment of being, but accepting it for what it is, a “whole” which suddenly presented itself to her, she feels that it gives her the scope to explore the way these things suddenly make a whole, the connection which she perceived between the flower, the earth, and herself. These is nothing “behind” this whole as such, it has no real or symbolical meaning, apart from the mental process of her own consciousness of it. The concept of “whole” is thus, for Woolf, the total sum of the “revelation” which springs out of such moments of being and in writing, she tries to create not only the “whole” but the entire experience, from the fragmented and disjointed to the whole. But this revelation does not make abstract the relations or correspondences between the facts. As Jinny sings to herself, she will think in The Waves, how she cannot go into a cave and merge the rainbow of colours into “one substance”, transcending the complexity of the visible world to touch a pure world of abstract essences in a distant echo of Plato’s allegory of the cave, but wishes to experience life in all its complexity:

‘But we who live in the body see with the body’s imagination things in outline. I see rocks in bright sunshine. I cannot take these facts into some cave and, shading my eyes, grade their yellows, blues, umbers into one substance. I cannot remain seated for long. I must jump up and go. The coach may start from Piccadilly. I drop all these facts—diamonds, withered hands, china pots and the rest of it—as a monkey drops nuts from its naked paws. I cannot tell you if life is this or that. I am going to push out into the heterogeneous crowd. I am going to be buffeted; to be flung up, and flung down, among men, like a ship on the sea. (W, 125)

The “facts” not being abstracted but rather rearranged in these moments of being into a pattern, like lights on a Christmas tree: “Let us decorate our Christmas tree with facts and again with facts” (W, 124).

In such a way, the narrator in ‘The String Quartet’ has not come to the concert to just let herself be submerged by pleasant thoughts and dreams in a form of escapism into some form of musical “paradise”, as Werner Wolf believes, but to consciously analyse and assess the power of music in her search for something more fundamental, something which goes beyond the surface, the conventions and the appearances, and which transcends the moment, something which is not outside each and every one of us but something which we are part of. For Werner Wolf the last few lines of ‘The String Quartet’ exemplify an “anti-climactic vision of a re-entrance into a world of negativity [...]: while during the concert images of happy togetherness and fulfilled desires had prevailed, its end throws the concert-goers, and with them the protagonist, back onto the thorns of the same world of unsatisfied desire and isolation which had been evoked at the beginning of the story”. As we have seen, the narrator’s response throughout the story was hardly an image of “happy togetherness and fulfilled desires”. The ending of the second dream-sequence is particularly negative itself as the last rose leaf fails to settle. Even the mention of the laughing fishwives at the end of the first movement only served to highlight the narrator’s own distress at not being able to be happy in their simple way. Werner Wolf therefore sees Woolf’s understanding of music as an artistic “paradise” which we may enter in order to escape the meaninglessness and futility of everyday life:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{142}}\text{ Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op. cit., p. 162. It is true that after the revelation of the final dream-sequence in ‘The String Quartet’, the narrator, at the end of the concert, will significantly seek out “those who, stepping lightly, go smiling through the world”, the simple happy characters of the applewoman and the maid, modern-day fellows of the simple “jolly fishwives” which she imagined so good, carefree and happy in the first dream-sequence.}\text{\textsuperscript{143}}\text{ ibid. p. 160. Truly enough, in The Years, the discrepancy between the music of the final dance and the horrors of the world outside will be revealed to Eleanor: “The music which had been cutting grooves in her mind had ceased. There was a lull—a silence. Far away she heard the sounds of the London night; a horn hooted; a siren wailed on the river. The far-away sounds, the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of night, made her say over Eleanor’s words, Happy in this world, happy with living people. But how can one be “happy”? she asked herself, in a world bursting with misery. On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed.” (Y, 418-419)}\]
The cyclical recurrence of the initial everyday experience of music [...] frames and thus contains positivity. [...] the expulsion from paradise is not definite. Thanks to art we are allowed to re-enter it from time to time, since it is contained in everyday life, just as the reception of music, in Woolf's story, is contained within a frame of urban life.\textsuperscript{144}

Whereas there is undoubtedly a dialectic between the world of music or art and the everyday routine, Werner Wolf has taken all the musical response(s) of the narrator for granted, failing to see certain subversions inscribed within the narrative which reveal a critical distance taken by Virginia Woolf herself towards some of her narrator's experiences. Sitting "passive on a gilt chair", observing and questioning the world around her, the narrator, catching some of the audience members "off their guard" will find that some of them are also searching within this musical experience for this elusive "truth" about being. As in 'The Mark on the Wall', the narrator is trying to see beyond "that shell of a person which is seen by other people" because the world would otherwise be such "an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world" (SF, 85).

As the second violin tunes in the ante-room, announcing the music to come, the conventional poses and social masks worn by the audience are suddenly shed and the expression of their true selves is momentarily revealed to the narrator: "watch that elderly face against the dark canvas, a moment ago urbane and flushed; now taciturn and sad, as if in shadow. Was it the sound of the second violin tuning in the ante-room?" The sound of the violin will silence the audience, the room will suddenly become quiet ("taciturn\textsuperscript{145}" and from gazing outwards, the gaze of the audience will turn inwards, into their own self: the face of the old man expressing "sadness",\textsuperscript{146} gravity, seriousness, a face without any tension, tuning into his own inner self, burrowing deep down into his consciousness. The old man is in "shadow", even his bodily presence become unsubstantial, unimportant – in the final dream sequence, the two lovers have in a similar way "left [their] bodies in the banqueting hall. Those on the turf are the shadows of our souls". The music will itself be associated with disembodiment – as the "four black figures" seat themselves at their music stands,

\textsuperscript{144} Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the theory and history of Intermediality, op. cit., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{145} See OED online – definition of 'taciturn' from tacere, to be silent: "Characterized by silence or disinclination to conversation; reserved in speech; saying little; uncommunicative."
\textsuperscript{146} Interestingly, the origin of the word "sad", both in its Germanic and Nordic roots and in Greek and Latin, means "satiated, full, enough". See online Oxford English – definition and etymology of 'sad'.
themselves in a shadow. Shadows are very often linked to the notion of “dream”\textsuperscript{,147} The music will lead him to turn back into himself and stop speaking to others, showing her that she is not the only person to have come to the concert in search of her self, in search of something which had long since been “forgotten” under the layers of social varnish, as she “turns the earth above a buried memory, as we all do” because she sees that “there are signs, if I’m not mistaken, that we’re all recalling something, \textit{furtively seeking something}” (\textit{SQ}, 139, my italics). The superficial pattern of convention, time neatly segmented, people sitting in rows on gilt chairs, processions, pins which keep the ties straight, etc. all this apparent pattern and order is taken apart, reassessed in the light of the musical experience to come. In such a way, the narrator has come to the concert for one specific reason: to find out whether the musical experience does have some sort of transcendental function which would provide an answer to the narrator’s own sense of dissatisfaction with the way “the facts” of life don’t seem to add up. Just as the narrator in ‘The String Quartet’ will want to make abstraction of the “hard facts” of reality, Bernard in \textit{The Waves}, will feel the need to experience life from underneath the surface of the stream of facts – away from the superficiality of “shabby trousers” and “buttoned cloth”, in order to pierce down into the depths of being:

\textquote{It is, however, true that my dreaming, my tentative advance like one carried beneath the surface of a stream, is interrupted, torn, pricked and plucked at by sensations, spontaneous and irrelevant, of curiosity, greed, desire, irresponsible as in sleep. (I covet that bag—etc.) No, but I wish to go under; to visit the profound depths; once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore; to hear vague, ancestral sounds of boughs creaking, of mammoths; to indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding—impossible to those who act. Am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy, which, unmoored as I am from a private being, bid me embrace these engrossed flocks; these starers and trippers; these errand-boys and furtive and fugitive girls who, ignoring their doom, look in at shop-windows? But I am aware of our ephemeral passage. (W, 81-82)}

In ‘The String Quartet, the narrator is therefore listening to the music in a particular way and she is there precisely to question the nature of the musical

\textsuperscript{147} Michael Ferber, entry for “dream”, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 64.
experience in relation to her perception of “life itself”, to find out why she and the rest of the audience has found the time and energy to come and listen to music - to do something which at first view has no raison d’être, has no immediate usefulness (as opposed to writing about the leak in the larder, looking for her gloves which she left in the train, buying houses, etc.). As we have seen, the remark, “it’s difficult this”, reveals that the narrator is, from the beginning, in total control of even the most fanciful of “dream-sequences”. In the interval, the narrator will however unwittingly reveal the effect of the music, i.e. to see the world in a new light:

Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next to me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashes green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting. (SQ, 140)

The music has made the disparate “simple”, has made her see the “facts” of life with a renewed interest. The narrator in ‘The String Quartet’, undoubtedly came to the concert in search for the “truth”, for what is behind the “cotton wool” of daily life, with its influenza, leaks in the larder, gloves left in trains, hats, fur boas, gentlemen’s swallowtail coats, and pearl tie-pins... The music however was not to provide the truth but finally gave the narrator a way by which she could free herself from a superficial society which is “damned” (SQ, 139) to wallow in its own mediocrity, since “it’s all a matter of flats and hats and seagulls, or so it seems to be for a hundred people sitting here well dressed, walled in, furred, replete” (SQ, 139).

For Woolf the modern short story need not answer the questions which it raises, but it does certainly raise the questions. As Woolf once said, “it is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair” (‘Modern Novels’,

---

148 In a diary entry of 1919, Virginia recorded her experience of a private concert which may have been in her mind when she wrote ‘The String Quartet’, noting in particular how “the company was decorous & fur bearing as usual; & the music like the voice of spirits in another world enticing the hopelessly damned” (D1: 245). In another diary entry, Virginia Woolf will be puzzled at why such “ordinary” looking people “crowd” to the concert hall to hear music: “I daresay the playing wasn’t very good, but the stream of melody was divine. It struck me what an odd thing it was – this little box of pure beauty set down in the middle of London streets, & people – all looking so ordinary, crowding to hear, as if they weren’t ordinary after all, or had an ambition for something else” (D1: 33). During the first world war, on the 7th of June 1918, “I went to the Magic Flute, & thought rather better of humanity for having that in them” (D1: 153-154).
1919, *E3*: 36). The musical experience of The String Quartet’s narrator will indeed cause her to finally despair, as at the close of the performance she wishes only to go, to greet the applewoman and speak to the maid. Disappointed that no one answer or revelation was given to her by the music, she will however, like Bernard in *The Waves*, want to go out back into the world with a new way of seeing things, oblivious to the fact that this *is* the very essence of the musical experience, the answer to the question she first asked herself before the start of the performance: why listen to music? We have shown in this chapter how Virginia Woolf understood music in its relation to the consciousness, the emotions and finally the phenomenological modalities of our very existence. The essence of the musical experience could be summed up in the words of Bernard in *The Waves*:

> who is to say what meaning there is in anything? [...] All is experiment and adventure. (*W*, 84)

Music is understood by Virginia Woolf to be neither an analogy for the consciousness or the emotions, nor a metaphor for a (better) transcendent world, but that it reveals in itself, *qua* music, the creative modalities of a consciousness which can itself shape the world differently. Paradoxically, we come to the conclusion that Woolf’s understanding of music is utterly formalist because her dramatization of the various facets of the musical experience in her short story ‘The String Quartet’ reveals finally that what is important in music is its purely musical characteristics – the rest, the feelings, the words, the images and the metaphors which we associate with music or which we use to describe what is after all a highly individual and uncommunicable experience, remains secondary. Therein lies for Woolf the paradigmatical nature of musical expression and this necessarily affects her musicalization of the novels themselves as we shall now show in Chapters four and five.
CHAPTER 4. *THE WAVES* AS MUSICALIZATION OF FICTION

Whereas the approach to music and its role in Woolf’s aesthetics was handled in ‘The String Quartet’ more thematically than stylistically, music will prove to be also a methodological model in her longer fiction. As we cannot study in detail each and every one of Woolf’s novels within the context of this thesis, we shall focus in the next two chapters primarily on *The Waves*, probably the most experimental novel of the whole of Woolf’s corpus of works and one in which she deliberately set out to effect a musicalization of fiction. Many observations which we shall be making concerning *The Waves* could also be made of Woolf’s other novels. From an overview of the current melopoetic critiques of this novel - interesting from an interdisciplinary and critical methodological point of view - we then proceed to give our own interpretation of Woolf’s musicalization of fiction, focusing in particular on the problem of polyphony and simultaneity of voicing in the novel. This will lead us to establish a new typology of musico-literary relations, determined by our analysis of Woolf’s musicalization of the narrative strategies in *The Waves*.

a. A musical “conception”?

I think I am about to embody, at last, the exact shapes my brain holds. What a long toil to reach this beginning – if The Waves is my first work in my own style! (D4:53)

*The Waves* is considered by the majority of literary scholars to be Woolf’s most experimental novel and indeed, Virginia Woolf herself thought of it as such, noting in particular in her diary the importance she gave to its form and design above all and the difficulties which arose thereby.

This book is a very queer business. I had a day of intoxication when I [...] felt the pressure of the form – the splendour & the greatness – as – perhaps, I have never felt them. But I shan’t race it off in intoxication. I keep pegging away; & find it the most complex, & difficult of all my books. (D3:298)
Virginia Woolf wrote the whole novel through twice by hand. After typing out the first draft and she proceeded to rewrite the book again from the start, basing herself on that first typescript but deviating somewhat from the original draft even though many common elements will be kept to the end. This second draft was also typed and this is described by Graham as the second typescript. Woolf usually typed the drafts concomitantly with writing the novel by hand – rereading and retyping during the day what she had sketched early in the morning. From then on, Virginia Woolf retyped the second typescript before giving the work to a professional typist and eventually proofreading the novel before publication. Unfortunately, the typescripts have all been lost or destroyed by Virginia Woolf herself (on the 30th of September, six weeks after sending the proofs off, Woolf writes in her diary that “I must seriously set to & destroy & mass together two months of papers.” (D4: 46)) but we have the two complete hand written drafts of the novel as well as the final published text to work from. By collating the diary entries which mention possible musicalization with the relevant sections of the manuscript, which very often are dated themselves, we may analyse the various revisions, as they indicate how and at which stage of composition she may have thought of an underlying musical model to shape the novel. If anything, the diary entries should only be read consecutively with the manuscript since they pertain to the work in progress rather than to the final published text. Another advantage of having access to the manuscripts is that it will enable us to also focus our attention on the different versions of those sections of the novel which deal specifically with music (Rhoda’s string quartet experience, Bernard’s references to musicalization, etc), as well as sections which mentioned music in the holograph drafts but which were then subsequently deleted by the author. As Mark Hussey has noted, “the status of draft material should not be taken for granted in reading a published text; however, it is of particular help in reading The Waves as revisions are


2 J. W. Graham’s introduction to the two holograph drafts of The Waves gives a very clear and precise account of the chronology of Woolf’s composition of the novel, allowing us to get a glimpse into the actual process of writing. This is particularly helpful for us in determining the role and extent of Woolf’s process of musicalization, in particular his collation of dates is particularly helpful, cf. The Waves – The two holograph drafts, op.cit., p. 69-72.
nearly always contractions or deletions”. In the drafts, Virginia Woolf is not only sketching out the novel in itself but also noting down instructions to herself as well as her own thoughts as to what she is trying to express in each scene (for instance this remark on “The Death Chapter”: “It should be kept simple & large... the rhythmic design should dominate the facts. Only one or two scenes” in Graham, Notebook 8 page 755) and then proceeding to write out various versions of the passages in question. “The draft – as is usual in Woolf’s work – is more explicit” than the final version and this is particularly helpful as it can clarify the meaning of certain otherwise obscure passages. As Woolf herself said, “I write variations of every sentence; compromises; bad shots; possibilities; till my writing book is like a lunatic’s dream. Then I trust to some inspiration on re-reading; & pencil them into some sense” (D3: 275).

The majority of Virginia Woolf’s letters and diary entries dealing specifically with The Waves are foremost reflections as to the nature of its structure, the “method” by which she is painstakingly composing the novel - painstakingly “sticking it down” (D3: 259) as she described the process. Even though she had already thought out several scenes in 1927 and 1928, describing it as “an entirely new kind of book” (L4: 35), she started “seriously” writing the novel in September 1929 (D4: 35), noting in particular that “the shape of the book wants considering - & with time I could do it”. Significantly, whilst retaining her conception of the structure, in particular the “play-poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream” (D3: 139) which she had already sketched back in 1927, she gives up at that point her original title of “Moths” as well as the original story-line in which moths were to play a central role (this was inspired to her by a description of a plague of moths in one of Vanessa Bell’s letters from Cassis, cf. L4: 387):

the ship, the night&c, all flowing together: intersected by the arrival of the bright moths. A man & a woman are to be sitting at table talking. Or shall they remain silent? It is to be a love story: she is finally to let the last great moth in. The contrasts might be something of this sort: she might talk, or think, about the age of the earth: the death of

4 Virginia Woolf, Notebook 8, in Graham, op. cit., page 755.
5 Mark Hussey. op. cit. p. 90.
Undeniably, this first outline does roughly resemble the “play-poem idea” of 1927:

Why not invent a new kind of play; as for instance:
Woman thinks...
He does.
Organ plays.
She writes.
They say:
She sings.
Night speaks
They miss

I think it must be something on this line - though I can't now see what. Away from facts; free; yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel and a play. (D3:128, 21 February 1927)

Reading the diaries of 1928 to 1931, we get an idea as to the “fin” Woolf was trying to “net” in this new novel (D4: 10): from the start, The Waves was to be foremost an experiment in form featuring the dramatic and aural qualities of a play and whose content would draw on the poetic, away from the superficial “facts of life” which were the plague of the realist novels Woolf was so critical of. In fact, rather than writing “to a plot”, Woolf will be “writing The Waves to a rhythm” (D3: 316). In 1928, casting around for an idea for a new book, she felt like writing “something abstract poetic” (D3: 185) in contrast to the “voluble” (D3: 186) style of Orlando, which she had rapidly dashed off as light entertainment following the publication of To the Lighthouse. Woolf again describes ‘The Moths’ in a subsequent diary entry as “an abstract mystical eyeless book” (D3: 203) whose qualities were to lie more in the transcendent nature of its abstract design – “the whole effect” - than in the story-line, a design which was to be based on a system of internal correspondences from which emerged a nebulous pattern:

never, in my life, did I attack such a vague yet elaborate design; whenever I make a mark I have to think of its relation to a dozen others. And though I could go on ahead
easily enough, I am always stopping to consider the whole effect. In particular is there some radical fault in my scheme? I am not quite satisfied with this method of picking out things in the room & being reminded by them of other things \((D3: 259, 11\text{ October 1929})\)

In early November 1929, the conception of the book haunts her as she asks herself, “is there some falsity, of method, somewhere? Something tricky? – so that the interesting things aren’t firmly based?” \((D3: 264)\). In January and February 1930, she is still thinking about “making my book the right shape”, the difficulty being, “how to pull it together, how to compost [sic] it – press it into one” \((D3: 285)\). In April 1930, still in difficulty, she notes in her diary,

like every piece of the book it goes by fits & starts. I never get away with it; but am tugged back. I hope this makes for solidity; must look to my sentences. The abandonment of Orlando & Lighthouse is much checked by the extreme difficulty of the form – as it was in Jacob’s Room. I think this is the furthest development so far; but of course it may miss fire somewhere. I think I have kept stoically to the original conception. What I fear is that the re-writing will have to be so drastic that I may entirely muddle it somehow. It is bound to be very imperfect. But I think it possible that I have got my statues against the sky. \((D3: 300)\)

Only a few days later, on the 29th of April 1930, having finished her first draft and considering the novel as a whole, she will reconsider the effect and lament that “the structure is wrong” \((D3: 302)\), even though she will not waver from her original conception and constantly measure her developments against her plans (“I think I have kept starkly & ascetically to the plan” \((D3: 302)\)). She will from then on focus her mind on going through the whole, “re-building, yes, not only re-modelling” \((D3: 302)\), still concerned above all about the effect of the overall shape of the novel. Ten days before completing the second draft of the novel, nearly a year later, on the 26th of January 1931, she notes that he has “seen the entire book whole, & how I can finish it” \((D4: 7)\) and her diary entries suggest that by February, she had in fact “altered the scheme considerably” \((D4: 8)\) to accommodate the ending, of which she had another 20 pages or so to write, even though she feels that “I have just done what I meant [...]”; my feeling is that I have insisted upon saying, by hook or by crook certain things I meant to say. I imagine that the hookedness may be so great that it will be a failure
from a reader’s point of view. Well, never mind: it is a brave attempt, I think, & something struggled for” (D4: 8, 2 February 1931). Once again finished for the second time, she will re-read and correct the whole novel in order to bring it all in its new perspective:

I am now engaged in typing out from start to finish the 332 pages of that very condensed book The Waves. I do 7 or 8 daily; by which means I hope to have the whole complete by June 16th or thereabouts. This requires some resolution; but I can see no other way to make all the corrections, & keep the lilt, & join up, & expand & do all the other final processes. It is like sweeping over an entire canvas with a wet brush. (D4: 25)

The formal problems Woolf encountered throughout her conception and drafting of this novel led her to consider musicalization as a possible solution. Even though it may be perhaps too bold to assert that musicalization in itself was the subject of the novel, it certainly comes very close to being so as Woolf uses the musical paradigm to bridge the usual divide between form and content. As Elicia Clements has argued, the originality of Woolf’s musicalization lies precisely in the fact that

music facilitates this intermingling of ‘form’, subjectivity, and cultural critique, which are inseparable in her experimental novels. The [musical] method for The Waves, then, is as much about reconstituting human interaction as it is about formulating new narrative structures.”

The Waves is one of Woolf’s works most directly connected with music, from the circumstantial evidence given to us in her diary to the actual melopoetic clues scattered around the text itself. Read in parallel, these two sources inform and complete each other and thus form a wider melopoetic picture on which we can base our interpretation of the features of Woolf’s musicalization of The Waves. A study of Woolf’s writing process certainly tests the relevance and validity of seeing this text as a musicalization of fiction and puts its musical features into perspective, thus enabling us to draw a more complete pattern of Woolf’s emerging process of musicalization.

than has yet been made. Because of the wealth of musical references in both the diaries and the text itself, *The Waves* has been the focus of a small number of specific melopoetic studies which have variously, and variously convincingly, looked at Woolf’s use of the musical model within this novel.

b. **The Waves and the musical model: conflicting melopoetic readings of The Waves**

*The Waves* dramatizes the lives of six friends, three girls (Jinny, Susan and Rhoda) and three boys (Bernard, Neville and Louis), from their childhood together, their time at school and university, etc. to their old age or their death. A seventh figure, one of the most enigmatic and influential characters in the novel, Percival, never speaks directly – we only hear about him through the eyes of the other six. His meaningless death half-way through the novel, shattering his friends’ sense of security and identity, will be a turning point in whole novel. The originality of the whole narrative procedure adopted by Virginia Woolf in order to express the parallel lives of her characters is that of an alternance of voices or “dramatic soliloquies”, as she described them in her diary (*D3*: 312). As we have already briefly mentioned in our opening chapter, this original and extraordinary effect is often explained metaphorically by critics in terms of music, in particular as it is described as a “symphony” metanarratively in the novel (*W*, 182). Considering the importance given to the symphonic genre in the text itself, one would have expected most critics to focus on this specific aspect of musical “borrowing” above all, but strangely enough, none do so systematically, if at all. This is perhaps due to the wealth of corroborative melopoetic evidence which accompanies Woolf’s work on the novel – a double-edged sword if any there was, as it can be both revealing and misleading. Before proceeding with our own analysis of the symphonic paradigm in *The Waves*, we shall examine the conflicting melopoetic readings of this novel as these bring up a certain number of interesting, if not problematical points.

This novel has indeed given rise to many interdisciplinary interpretations by musically inclined critics, from those who see the novel to be unmistakably modeled on Beethoven’s op. 130/133 string quartet or Stravinsky’s *Firebird*, to those who claim Wagner’s *Parsifal* or alternatively his cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, are the
true musical source of Woolf’s narrative and others who find Schoenberg’s pantonal and serialist music a more alluring source of influence or some, on the other hand, who see The Waves as prefiguring Schaeffer and Cage’s experimental concrete music whilst others see in the poetic quality of her style the unmistakable tokens of a musical ear (McNichol). Could this novel truly be Beethovenian (Levin, Clements), Wagnerian (DiGaetani, Phillips, Blisset, Marcus), Schoenbergian (Levin, Schulze), Stravinskyrian (Evelyn Haffer), Schaefferian and Cagian (Cuddy-Keane) all at once? Not only content to be a patchwork of musical styles, it is also a patchwork of musical genres, alternatively described as a symphony (Clements, Aronson), a chorus (Cuddy-Keane), a sextet (Forster), a ballet (Haller), an opera (Phillips, Marcus), an antiphon (Graham) and a fugue (Clements, Levin), to name but a few. What an immense musical versatility is Virginia Woolf here credited with. A question immediately presents itself: why is her novel seen to be such a kaleidoscope of contradictory and self-exclusive musical styles and techniques? And would there not be some as yet overlooked underlying musical principle common to all these styles and genres? Before we propose our own interpretation of how music functions in this novel, we shall need evaluate and compare in some detail the alternative responses to Woolf’s musical style which have so far given rise to so many conflicting views.

(i) From Beethoven to Schoenberg

Three important diary entries frame Woolf’s work on the novel, from her first detailed sketch of ‘The Moths’ on the 18th of June 1927, to her thoughts as to the conclusion of the near-complete novel, on the 22nd of December 1930 and again on the 7th of January 1931. These three entries suggest a connection between Woolf’s conception of the novel and the music of Beethoven in particular, his late piano sonatas (which, it may be remembered, featured prominently in The Voyage Out, his sonata op. 111 in particular) and his late string quartet, op. 130 as well as the “Grosse Fuge” op. 133, the original finale of op. 130. Right at the start of Woolf’s work on this novel, she noted that “I do a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas” (D3: 139). Beethoven will however not be mentioned again in the diary until Woolf was approaching the end of the novel. Even though the first mention of Beethoven in her diary in 1927 could possibly be merely
circumstantial, the next two references occur in a more significant context. According to the dating of the manuscript of the second draft, Woolf was working on section 9 (Bernard's final soliloquy) between the 14th of December 1930 and the 7th of February 1931. During this time, Woolf will mention Beethoven twice in her diaries: On the 22nd of December 1930, she noted that

it occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech and end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes and having no further break. This is also to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion. (D3: 339)

Ten days before completing Bernard's final soliloquy, on the 7th of January 1931, Virginia Woolf will again mention Beethoven's string quartets. On the day she determined to "make prose move - as prose has never moved before" by "do[ing] B[ernard]'s soliloquy in such a way as to break up, dig deep" (D4: 4) and move away "from the chuckle & the babble" to create a "rhapsody", she deliberately set out to listen to Beethoven's op. 133, the original finale for his String quartet op. 130, noting in her diary that "we shall play the Grosse Fugue tonight" (D4:5). To what extent was the "Grosse Fugue" and other Beethoven scores instrumental as she completed the final soliloquy? More Beethovenian connections can be deduced from the text itself that she was writing at that period: Section 9 probably contains the most references to music out of the whole novel (as well as the fact that in its original versions, many more references to music are to be found). Beethoven in particular is mentioned in the published text as Bernard speaks of buying a picture of this composer:

---

8 To quote the full entry: "Few books have interested me more to write than The Waves. Why even now, at the end, I'm turning up a stone or two: no glibness, no assurance; you see, I could perhaps do B[ernard]'s soliloquy in such a way as to break up, dig deep, make prose move - yes I swear - as prose has never moved before: from the chuckle & the babble to the rhapsody. Something new goes into my pot every morning - something that's never been got at before. The high wind can't blow, because I'm chopping & tacking all the time. [...] We shall play the Grosse Fugue tonight." (D4: 4-5)
‘I rose and walked away—I, I, I; not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky, but I, Bernard. I even repeated my own name once or twice. I went, swinging my stick, into a shop, and bought—not that I love music—a picture of Beethoven in a silver frame. (W, 180)

Even though this is far from being the only reference to music in the text, it is the only reference made to any composer throughout the whole novel and it undoubtedly contributed to draw the critics’ attention towards the possible connections between the novel and the music of Beethoven

Only a few scholars have focused on the Beethovenian aspects of *The Waves*. One of the first, if not the first systematic study of the musicality of this novel was written by Gerald Levin in 1983,9 a study of *The Waves* highlighting the connections between Virginia Woolf and Beethoven on the one hand and Virginia Woolf and Schoenberg on the other. Two analyses followed in his wake, though several years later, which were to develop and expand on some of his ideas: the Beethovenian angle in an article by Elicia Clements10 to the Schoenberg connection, on the other hand, which will form the basis of Robin Gail Schulze’s analysis of *The Waves* in a 1992 article,11 entitled ‘Design in Motion: Words, Music, and the search for Coherence in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Arnold Schoenberg’, in which he studies the parallels between Woolf’s musicality and Schoenberg’s style. Both Levin and Clements take Woolf’s two “Beethoven” diary entries and what they see as the corresponding textual reference to Beethoven in the novel itself as a starting point in order to justify their own investigation and Schulze herself will associate Schoenberg’s avant-garde style with Beethoven’s later works. Because Beethoven’s style was dramatically innovative in his time - in particular those works associated with *The Waves*, his late string quartets -, he has often been seen as the precursor to many modern musical trends. As Robin Gail Schulze argues, “Schoenberg himself presents Beethoven’s late quartets as an antecedent to his own more radical systems”.12

---

Unlike Elicia Clements’ exposé of direct parallels between the characters of *The Waves* and individual movements from Beethoven’s last string quartet op. 130 and its correlative, the “Große Fuge” op. 133 (which is in fact its original *finale* and which we shall study in our next section), Gerald Levin draws on excerpts from J.W.N. Sullivan’s 1927 volume of criticism of the Beethoven quartets and discusses Sullivan’s criticism rather than Beethoven’s music as such, even though, as he admits himself, “it is impossible to know whether Sullivan’s book [...] was the reason for her interest” in Beethoven, this composer being “much discussed by writers in these years – in 1927 notably by Sir Donald Tovey in his essay on Beethoven’s art forms, in *Music and Letters*”.13 1927 was, of course, the year of the centenary of Beethoven’s death and this no doubt contributed to bringing his music and personality to the cultural forefront.14 Levin will point out Bernard’s non-musical assessment of the composer’s fame and his admiration for his personality and artistic achievements (Bernard does, after all, buy the picture not because he loves music, but “because the whole of life, its masters, its adventurers, then appeared in long ranks of magnificent human beings behind me; and I was the inheritor; I, the continuer; I, the person miraculously appointed to carry it on” *W*, 180). Certain aspects of Beethoven’s personal life, in particular his own struggle with deafness, has fuelled many programmatic or biographical interpretations of his otherwise “absolute” music, a phenomenon which has been described by William S. Newman as the “Beethoven mystique”.15 That a musician should indeed tragically go deaf half-way through his career and still continue to compose music in a style which increasingly pushed the very boundaries of every genre he touched, certainly contributed to creating the immense aura which still surrounds his personality and figure today and underpinned much criticism of his music. Is that why Bernard buys a portrait of Beethoven? As an indication that even though he is not musical and dislikes concerts, Bernard finds solace in Beethoven's personality (but not his music), his constant defiance *envers et contre tout*. The notion that the Beethovenian fugue in particular is an illustration of

---


235
the struggle of life was particularly popular, Sullivan thus speaking of op. 133 as a piece “in which the apparently opposing elements of life are seen as necessary and no longer in opposition”. Gerald Levin will pounce upon this interpretation of the “meaning” of Beethoven’s quartet in order to put it in parallel with his own rather narrow interpretation of the “meaning” of Woolf’s novel which he deduces rather simplistically from the last phrases of the book, Bernard’s last challenge against death and his final decision to continue to fight and live on:

Sullivan’s characterization of the Opus 130 fugue [i.e. op. 133] as the “reconciliation of freedom and necessity, or of assertion and submission,” suggests the major theme of the final section, our “freedom” to experience the “eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and rise again.” Assertion and submission are key ideas in the novel, particularly in Bernard’s assertion of the power of life – “Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!” – and they are for Sullivan essential to understanding the late quartets.17

Sullivan will furthermore establish in his monograph the presence of a “dominating, central experience”18 in all the late quartets (op. 130/133 and op. 131 in particular), which determines the meaning of the “separate experiences” of the individual movements which are seen to radiate from it. Levin takes this programmatic analysis and sees it as the model for the “uniting [...] consciousness” of Bernard, the “dominating, central experience” of the novel, and his relation to the lives of his friends who gravitate around him.19 This, as we shall see below, will be the starting point to Elicia Clements’ analysis of the parallels between individual movements and each of the characters. What is seen to clinch the argument for Levin is that, in the last soliloquy, “Bernard identifies himself with Beethoven”.20 Things get more tricky when Levin endeavours to go beyond the thematic and metaphorical aspects of Woolf’s musicalization in order to show an actual stylistic influence by proceeding to define first the principles of the fugue21 and then “music itself” (and not only Beethoven’s music as interpreted by Sullivan) as “the impulsion toward a unity

---

20 *ibid.*, p. 218.
21 *ibid.*, p. 217.
achieved, the music resolving into silence and beginning again, Sullivan’s ‘apparently opposing elements of life... seen as necessary and no longer in opposition’\textsuperscript{22} thus reading the conventional harmonic tensions of the progression from discord to concord, from dominant (instability) to tonic (stability), from sound to silence, as symbolizing a “move [...] towards a final ‘resolution of forces’”\textsuperscript{23} similar to the novel’s own thematic progression from the atmosphere of despair and instability provoked by the increasing pressure of society and convention on the children as they grow up, to their own individual response to the climactic and senseless death of Percival in their middle age and its effect on their destinies: Louis will bury himself in business and commerce (\textit{W}, 118-121), Susan will rock herself to “sleep” and thus weave a “cocoon” round her life and the lives of her children (\textit{W}, 121-123), Jinny will dazzle herself in a whirl of socializing, balls and love affairs (\textit{W}, 123-126), Neville will pursue an academic career and lose himself in reading ancient Greek literature (\textit{W}, 126-129). All four will measure themselves against society and embrace convention in order to keep a semblance of order and balance in their lives. Only Rhoda and Bernard, two exiled and solitary characters, will mirror each other’s self-awareness and gauge their being against life and death: Rhoda, “blown for ever outside the loop of time” (\textit{W}, 15), will flee the horrors of a superficial and ugly society which she abhors, but will finally not find the rail by which to anchor herself, always pursued, always on the edge of annihilation. This is prefigured in one of her early nightmares:

\begin{quote}
‘As I fold up my frock and my chemise,’ said Rhoda, ‘so I put off my hopeless desire to be Susan, to be Jinny. But I will stretch my toes so that they touch the rail at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard. Now I cannot sink; cannot altogether fall through the thin sheet now. Now I spread my body on this frail mattress and hang suspended. I am above the earth now. I am no longer upright, to be knocked against and damaged. All is soft, and bending. Walls and cupboards whiten and bend their yellow squares on top of which a pale glass gleams. Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of hard contacts and collisions. I sail on alone under the white cliffs. Oh, but I sink, I fall! That is the corner of the cupboard; that is the nursery looking-glass. But they stretch,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{ibid.}, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ibid.}, p. 222.
they elongate. I sink down on the black plumes of sleep; its thick wings are pressed to my eyes. Travelling through darkness I see the stretched flower-beds, and Mrs Constable runs from behind the corner of the pampas-grass to say my aunt has come to fetch me in a carriage. I mount; I escape; I rise on spring-heeled boots over the tree-tops. But I am now fallen into the carriage at the hall door, where she sits nodding yellow plumes with eyes hard like glazed marbles. Oh, to awake from dreaming! Look, there is the chest of drawers. Let me pull myself out of these waters. But they heap themselves on me; 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, with people pursuing, pursuing.' (W, 19-20)

In a similar way, Bernard will taunt death and walk to the very edge of oblivion. Like Rhoda, he finds himself weightless, floating bodyless in the dark while fragments of his past return to him in flashes:

A man without a self, I said. A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man. With dispassionate despair, with entire disillusionment, I surveyed the dust dance; my life, my friends' lives, and those fabulous presences, men with brooms, women writing, the willow tree by the river—clouds and phantoms made of dust too, of dust that changed, as clouds lose and gain and take gold or red and lose their summits and billow this way and that, mutable, vain. 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? (W, 202-203)

But unlike Rhoda who will give up the struggle and commit suicide (W, 205), he will "miraculously" see the sun return after its dark eclipse and fight to live (W, 209-211). As Levin considers all music to express an ongoing struggle of life against death, this allows him to depart from Beethoven altogether because he cannot draw satisfactory parallels between op. 133 and the novel's structure beyond those he establishes rather perfunctorily and without justification between Sullivan's views and his own interpretation of the "meaning" of The Waves, parallels far removed from the actual text and music in question. Levin indeed argues rather perfunctorily that the simultaneousness of voices demanded by the musical idiom cannot be literally achieved in the novel and therefore any actual technical parallels between the music
and the literature will fail. All that Levin’s analysis in fact tells us is that Woolf may have known Sullivan’s critique of Beethoven’s music and may have found in his interpretation of the meaning of Beethoven’s music the inspiration for her underlying theme of “effort, effort”, this “theme” being linked to Beethoven in the diary entry in question (D3: 339). Obviously conscious of the shortcomings of his analysis and searching for a more convincing argument, Levin will bring in Schoenberg out of the blue in order to give a more detailed and technical music/literary parallel: “a better description of the musical style of the novel is ‘pantonal’”, concluding that Woolf at that time was “moving in a new direction of musical style” away from Beethoven and this, despite the fact that Virginia Woolf had no apparent knowledge of Schoenberg nor of much avant-garde continental music. But Levin proceeds to interpret Woolf in the light of Schoenberg’s style through the programmatic eyes of Sullivan, finding in Schoenberg the same “themes” which Sullivan highlighted in Beethoven:

These characteristics of pantonal music seem to me to correspond to those of Woolf’s novel, in particular the impression it creates of continuous experience, each moment having the same value as every other. The unity of experience in both the novel and the pantonal composition remains the goal, perpetually sought and in the novel never quite achieved, much as the waves reach the shore and immediately disappear. [...] This same sense of the fragmentary quality of life and at the same time of an underlying structure is contained in Sullivan’s characterization of the late quartets.

24 ibid., p. 218.
25 ibid., p. 222.
26 ibid., p. 218.
27 ibid., p. 222.
28 Apart from Wagner and Strauss, both of whom she heard for the first time in 1909 during her trip to Bayreuth with Saxon Sydney-Turner, very little is said about any other 20th Century composers and there are very few references to contemporary music in Woolf’s diaries. Before hearing the 1879 César Franck piano quintet in 1923, she will note in her diary that it will probably be too “severe” and “beyond me no doubt” (D2: 233), an expression which Peter Jacobs takes at face value (Jacobs, op.cit., 237) even though this may be understood rather as a pique towards Saxon Sydney-Turner’s patronizing attitude with whom she was going to the concert, Franck being a composer she otherwise admired (cf. D1: 20). She will describes Dukas’s 1906 opera, Ariane et Barbebleue, which she heard in 1937, as a “faded arty opera” (D5: 81). She had obviously heard Stravinsky’s music since she had been to see the Russian dancers in London and knew the dancer Lydia Lopokova personally but she does not offer us any comments. She does nevertheless make some direct references to the “Russian dancers” in her novels, as we have already mentioned elsewhere.
29 Gerald Levin, op.cit., p. 221.
The major problem with Levin’s study comes from the fact that he perceives all music (including Schoenberg’s) to embody the “struggle of life”, a problematic proposition in itself. But he will nevertheless assert:

the essential idea is that of music itself: the impulsion toward a unity achieved, the music resolving into silence and beginning again.30

Pantonality was a convenient alternative to the op. 133 fugue, because Levin saw it as a better musical model, one which was more easily adaptable in literature than that of the fugue, despite the fact that Woolf had apparently no knowledge or experience of pantonality, serialism or any avant-garde continental music despite claims to the contrary by Robin Gail Schulze who tried rather inefficiently to establish a direct source of influence through the medium of Woolf’s friendship with Ethel Smyth, arguing that the “exposure” given to Schoenberg in England by the BBC in the 1920s would have been sufficient to draw Woolf’s attention to the style of this composer.31

The notion of “continuous variation” rather than the more strict thematic repetition of Beethoven’s style, the sense of “delayed completion” as the whole row needs to be heard in totum rather than conventional harmonic progression, the “postponement of repetition” rather than the “art of repetition”32 which defines most classical and early Romantic music, and the egalitarian treatment of the notes forming the twelve-tone rows rather than a traditional harmonic hierarchy, are all indeed musical processes which can be “easily” read into literary procedures33 as they describe in serial music a monodic linear process (i.e. the row) which is closest to the linear phrase in the novel and thus avoid the problematical notions of simultaneity and vertical texture which other musical styles demand. As most Classical and Romantic pieces are fundamentally motivated by tonal principles, polyphony becomes necessary to articulate the harmony – both from a formal and a thematic point of view. Sonata-form, for instance, is defined by the Grove online as “a synthesis of the tonal structure, the sectional and cadential organization and the ordering and development

30 ibid., p. 220.
of the musical ideas". Serialism however, by throwing conventional harmony to the winds, is modelled on the contrary primarily on the horizontal features of the "row" and thus does not entail a vertical harmonic design, even though it may still be polyphonic, several rows progressing on different levels at the same time or the notes of the row split between the instruments of an ensemble or an orchestra. The difference is in the governing principle – on the one hand, the music is governed by a vertical harmony, on the other hand, it is governed by a horizontal series. The row appeared thus to Levin and Schulze as a perfect model as it could be used to parallel the sequential, linear, and egalitarian presentation of the characters’ voices in the novel.

If we briefly summarize their methodology, they both establish one-to-one correspondences between specific serial musical techniques and what they contend are musicalized literary devices (see Figure 9 below): just as there is no hierarchy between the notes of the row (no tonic, no dominant, etc.) but simply a randomly fixed order, Levin posits that there is similarly no hierarchy between the characters in the novel but a randomly fixed alternance of voices. As in pantonal music in which the tonalities are of equal value, all points of view in the novel are equal and no one character dominates the narrative. Just as the row functions according to the principles of continuous variation, recurring events or allusions to past events in the novel are at each point modified by experience and never exactly repeated, and thus all moments are of equal value.

Figure 9. Table of pantonal/serialist musico-literary correspondences for The Waves as outlined in Levin and Schulze

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pantonal/serialist musical techniques</th>
<th>corresponding musicalized devices in The Waves according to Levin and Schulze’s studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 12 tone row</td>
<td>• series of 6 alternating voices in different combinations (6 voice &quot;row&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• each note has the same value</td>
<td>• each voice has the same value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • thematic centres/pantonyality     | • circumscribed personalities of individual characters 

34 James Webster, 'sonata form', §1.1, Grove Music Online.
• continuous variation
• reference to and re-interpretation of past experiences
• all moments have equal values

However, these one-to-one correspondences, whilst superficially convincing, pose a certain number of problems. Despite attempts to find a “hidden” principle behind the order of the alternance of the voices, the only resemblance the series of alternating voices bears to the 12 tone row is that they both play on the notion of alternance. As Schulze argues: “In the opening of her first movement [Schulze is referring here rather impressionistically to the first episode], Woolf presents all six of her voices, six at a time, without repeating any one voice until the entire set has been used. No one presentation of the voice row is privileged, no one voice is privileged”. Even so, Schulze cannot help but allow for variations and discrepancies in the alternance of voices: “although Woolf, like most serial composers, does indeed deviate from the strict row presentation set out in the opening movement (voices repeat, interruptions intervene) at many points in The Waves, the patterns of carefully controlled rotation remain the same”. But not only does it remain that the order of Woolf’s alternance has no discernable pattern or logic to it, in contrast to the 12 tone row which functions according to strict principles of repetition through transposition, inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion, Woolf’s series of voices does not adhere to any principles at all – in fact the so-called “rotation” of the voices is hardly at times a “rotation” but a dialogue between two. Schulze’s analysis is misleading as we are only consistently given all six voices for each row without repetition or omission in the first two pages of the novel. After that, the subsequent alternances are not systematic “rows” of six. Schulze unsurprisingly gives only the first three “rows” as examples of Schoenbergian series as they correspond very neatly to her analysis:

The order of voices in the opening of the first voice pool of The Waves reads as follows:

Bernard-Susan-Rhoda-Neville-Jinny-Louis
Bernard-Susan-Louis-Rhoda-Neville-Jinny

---

35 Robin Gail Schulze, op.cit., p. 18.
36 ibid.
37 cf. Paul Griffiths, ‘Serialism’ §1, Grove Music Online.
Schulze implies quite strongly that many more “voice pools” follow these patterns of six alternating voices, arguing strongly in favour of a “serialist” reading of the text’s narratorial strategies. But if we were to give numbers to the voices as they are first given (Bernard = 1, Susan = 2, Rhoda = 3, Neville = 4, Jinny = 5, Louis = 6), the alternance of the first episode of the novel would read as follows and does not follow Schulze’s pattern at all beyond the first three series:

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 \\
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 6 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 \\
2 & \quad 3 & \quad 6 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 1 \\
2 & \quad 6 & \quad 5 & \quad 3 & \quad 1 & \quad 2 \\
6 & \quad 3 & \quad 5 & \quad 4 & \quad 1 & \quad 2 \\
6 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 & \quad 2 \\
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 1 & \quad 2 & \quad 1 & \quad 2 \\
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 \\
6 & \quad 2 & \quad 1 & \quad 5 & \quad 4 & \quad 3 \\
\text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

Schulze’s complete 6 voice “series” (see above)

From the 4th “row” onwards, the alternance of all six voices per “row” is not systematic. The grouping by 6 becomes questionable after the fourth row as Susan’s voice appears twice (number 2 highlighted in bold in first position and in last position of the 4th alternance). The forward slash indicates at which point the length of the soliloquies changes quite drastically (from 2-3 lines long to varying lengths up to 2-3 paragraphs long). This also marks the start of a new story-line which will culminate in the exchange between Bernard and Susan (1 and 2 in bold on the 7th and 8th row in the outline), thus further disrupting Schulze’s hypothetical “series” and undermining the theory as a whole.

This shows that neither Levin’s nor Schulze’s analyses are convincing enough to highlight a true Schoenbergian or serial influence or even a governing principle in Woolf’s novel, even though Schulze is candid enough to admit the point in an argumentative U-turn at the end of her study, concluding her essay with “a web of probability rather that [sic] an actual proof of influence.”

The way Levin and Schulze appropriate these musical theories and apply them to only the most obvious and general characteristics of Woolf’s style is extremely loose and unconvincing. Not only do they skirt round the problem of musical simultaneity by simply ignoring this aspect of what is however often complex polyphonic serial music but the idea of associating the personalities of the individual characters to the fluid pattern of

---

39 *ibid.*, p. 19.
interweaving “thematic centres” of pantonal music is a notion dangerously similar to the impressionistic and simplistic coupling of musical tonality to background “atmosphere” in literature (and vice-versa). Levin’s understanding of pantonality and serialism is furthermore seriously confused. He seems to consider pantonality and serialism as one and the same thing. “Pantonality”, though preferred by Schoenberg to describe his “atonal” music, is a term which was first used systematically in 1958 by musicologist Rudolph Réti to describe music which cannot be said to be clearly tonal, bitonal or atonal, but whose tonal focus shifts constantly between several tonal centres. Réti thus defines “the characteristic attribute of pantonality, through which it becomes a truly new concept and not merely an increased expression of classical tonality” as

the phenomenon of “movable tonics”, that is, a structural state in which several tonics exert their gravitational pull simultaneously, counteractingly, as it were, regardless of whether any of the various tonics ultimately becomes the concluding one.

Unsurprisingly, Réti considers Debussy to be the main champion of pantonal music and Debussy himself is known to have said that he chose his chords and harmonies for their textures and colours and not for their tonal value. As Debussy will say, “il n’y a pas de théorie: il suffit d’entendre. Le plaisir est la règle”, arguing that:

Ce qu’on pourrait souhaiter de mieux à la musique française c’est : de voir supprimer l’étude de l’harmonie telle qu’on la pratique à l’école et qui est bien la façon la plus solennellement ridicule d’assembler des sons. Elle a, de plus, le grave défaut d’unifier l’écriture à un tel point que tous les musiciens, à quelques exceptions près, harmonisent de la même manière.

---

40 cf. O.W. Neighbour, ‘Schoenberg’, §5, Grove Music Online.
43 “there is no theory: you simply need to listen. Pleasure is the rule”, Debussy, quoted in Marguerite Long. Au piano avec Claude Debussy, Paris: Julliard, 1960, p. 34, my translation.
44 “What we could wish for French music is to see the end of the study of harmony as we now teach it and which is really a most solemn way of assembling sounds. What's more, it has the serious fault of making all musicians, save a very few exceptions, write in a uniform style and harmonize in the same way”. Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche et autres écrits. Paris: Gallimard, 1987, p. 65, my translation.
The 12-tone series cannot though be said to be truly “pantonal” as it thwarts the idea of tonality itself and Levin fails to make the distinction, taking the 12-tone series as a “characteristic of pantonal music”,45 which is a contradiction in terms, especially considering Levin’s description of a particularly strict serial method in which the series occurs in the ‘mirror forms’ of inversion in which the pitch relations are inverted (the second note for example falling a third if the second note of the basic set rises a third), of retrograde, in which the basic set is played back to front, and of retrograde-inversion. [...] with the additional requirement that all twelve tones be heard before any of them is heard again” 46

Such a strict musical method can never be applied with any success to The Waves. We must admit that even though pantonality is a very different technique from serialism, its raison-d’être is similar, i.e. a move towards the dissolution of traditional harmony and hierarchies towards an egalitarian handling of sound, be it on the micro-level of equal individual notes characteristic of serial music or on the macro-level of equal harmonies and tonalities characteristic of pantonal music. This is of course the conclusion Schulze draws in his study of Woolf and Schoenberg: both Virginia Woolf and Schoenberg share a fundamental Modernist outlook, an “ideological similarity”47 in their rejection of conventional nineteenth-century aesthetic values and hierarchies:

looking again across disciplines, The Waves reveals a musical sensibility common to that of many twentieth-century composers, particularly that of the founding father of atonal expression, Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg’s push toward new forms in music – his ultimate rejection of functional tonality and his creation of the method of composing with twelve tones – resembles, in both rhetoric and ideology, Woolf’s rejection of chronological causal narrative and her subsequent creation of a “design in motion” to hold the text of The Waves together.48

45 Gerald Levin, op.cit., p. 221.
46 ibid.
47 Robin Gail Schulze, op.cit., p. 19.
48 ibid., p. 13.
Despite the methodological flaws we have highlighted above which seriously undermine Schulze and Levin’s studies, it remains to be asked what does a pantonal or serial reading of Woolf’s novel, such as that attempted by these two critics, actually tell us as to Woolf’s musicalization? The major drawback is that neither critic can prove any direct influence or any intentionality on Woolf’s part to write a “pantonal” or “serial” novel. Hoping therefore that her study is “helpful in defining the period and the sensibility we loosely term as ‘modern’”, the lame tone of Schulze’s last words does nothing to help convince us that a Schoenbergian reading of the novel would even enhance our perception of what are, after all, very obvious literary devices in themselves. Undeniably, Levin and Schulze interpret Woolf’s novel correctly when they state that Woolf was after expressing a sense of “ongoing experience” in which the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity are blurred, a sense that without a “protean” approach to art, such as Schulze sees in Woolf and Schoenberg’s aesthetics, the world would be but a mass of unformed incomprehensible chaos, but deducing from what are general Modernist aesthetic trends, a serialist or pantonal slant to Woolf’s musicalization of The Waves without any other further justification or more convincing parallels, is far too big a step to make.

(ii) Reading Beethoven’s op. 130/133 into The Waves

- Characterization in terms of musical movements

Unlike Gerald Levin, Elicia Clements focuses exclusively in her study on drawing detailed parallels between Beethoven’s music and Woolf’s novel. Clements proposes to study the possible connection between the “music that Woolf listened to while writing The Waves, or explicitly refers to in her novels” and “the process of the novel’s composition” by “correlating Woolf’s rhetorical and narratological experiments with her musical listening practices – the actual sounds that filled her
ears". By so doing, she tries to firmly ground her research in the domain of the likely (based primarily on the paratextual information) rather than the hypothetical (based on unproven and sometimes far-fetched connexions between Woolf and various musical styles/genres, as exemplified in the studies of Levin and Schulze we just reviewed, for instance). As she points out herself, "the novel's metanarrative material, however, speaks so frequently about the art form of music that the connection is viable regardless of any explicit comments about her writing process", leading her to propose her own vision of the novel as but one of many possible interpretations and not "in any way [leading] to the 'truth' of the novel's methods". Nevertheless, Clements does assume that her view of Woolf's method of musicalization of her novel is correct and viable and not in any way a far-fetched hypothesis like many other fanciful or unconvincing studies of Woolf's musicalization have been, her paper serving to argue the point.

We have already mentioned elsewhere that Virginia Woolf was listening to op. 133 when she was writing Bernard's final soliloquy (D4: 5), and correlating this work with certain aspects of Woolf's novel could indeed be the basis for a legitimate interdisciplinary enquiry into the expressive and structural modalities of the last section of the novel as we ourselves shall see below. Clements will however proceed to deduce from this diary entry that Woolf possibly had in mind the whole of Beethoven's quartet op. 130 when writing The Waves, thus extending Woolf's Beethovenian musicalization to the whole of the novel rather than just the final soliloquy, as the quartet op. 130 was usually played in Woolf's time with the first version of its sixth movement, the "Grosse Fugue" op. 133 rather than the more conventional Allegro Beethoven had been asked to replace it with after a very negative critical reception of the "Grosse Fugue" in 1827. Having established this by referring to the circumstantial evidence mentioned above (cf. D3: 339), Clements not only correlates op. 133 with the expressive modalities and style of Bernard's final soliloquy but endeavours by extension to closely correlate the characteristics of all the movements from op. 130 with the text itself, a critical interdisciplinary procedure which, as we have seen, Levin (and Schulze) failed to achieve from either the

---

53 ibid., p. 163.
54 cf. ibid., p. 165.
Beethovenian or, we may add, the serial and pantonal points of view. Even though Levin strongly suggested that Beethoven’s quartets gave Woolf a model for the expression of the struggle of life (according to Sullivan’s reading of Beethoven’s quartets), he could neither prove that Woolf did indeed think of Beethoven’s quartets in this way nor could he draw more precise literal parallels between the novel and Beethoven’s scores. This undermined his whole venture as he seemed to be confusing Sullivan’s appreciation of Beethoven with Woolf’s as there was evidence in his case neither to prove that Woolf had read Sullivan’s works nor to show that Woolf thought of Beethoven’s style in Sullivan’s terms, but there is certainly evidence, as Clements argues, that Beethoven, and his op. 133 in particular, was in her mind when she was writing her novel. As Clements notes, correlating The Waves with a work of musical criticism on Beethoven rather than with Beethoven’s music is a problem in itself, and how far this can be taken as a true instance of musicalization is highly debatable. Instead, and with more apparent scholastic rigour, Clements proposes to ground her research very carefully by justifying her analysis by means of referring to the paratextual mentions of Beethoven and thereby focusing on a study of the musical qualities of Beethoven’s music rather than his personality. For this reason, Clements’ study is particularly interesting in principle, from a methodological perspective, if not actually finally convincing in reality, as we shall see in more detail below.

The main argument of her paper is to show that there is a very intimate connexion between op. 130/133 and the novel to the point that she assumes the novel was actually carefully based from the start on the music of the quartet, thus being a true intermedial instance of the musicalization of fiction:

I understand her remarks about Beethoven and her listening experiences while composing the novel as signifying not an influence, but an intermedial (or quasi-intertextual) link [...]. rather than mapping one discipline onto another – an endeavor the novel itself thwarts – my discussion of the especially propitious associations between Opus 130 and The Waves will focus on the effect of their intersection.

Interestingly, Clements no doubt saw in Levin’s “pantonal” interpretation of The Waves the seed for a fruitful and original interdisciplinary investigation of the

55 ibid., p. 161.
56 ibid., p. 163.
characterization of the novel, proposing however an alluring alternative to Levin’s otherwise questionable thesis. Just as Levin saw each character to represent “tonal” centres within a pantonal context in which no one tonality predominates, the tonalities “melting” into one another in a similar fashion to the way the individualities of the characters overlap in the novel\textsuperscript{57} because the originality of Woolf’s egalitarian treatment of characterization lends itself to this sort of description, Clements will argue for her part in a similar way that the personality of each character is modelled on the character of particular movements from Beethoven’s op. 130/133 string quartet. Though not referring to “pantonality” in the way Levin suggested, Clements links the “tonality” (taking the term here in its broader sense of “distinctive qualities”) of the movements to the personalities of each of the characters in a very similar way: the characters are taken as focal dynamic forces in the narrative rather than the more typical causal or chronological linear sequence of events which Woolf was trying to subvert and depart from through her original handling of the narrative. From the hypothesis that Bernard’s final soliloquy (and thus Bernard’s role in the novel as a whole) was modelled on the op. 133 movement, Clements endeavours to show that the other characters are modelled on movements in a similar way. Though highlighting the hypothesis that the novel is based on the six movements of the Beethoven quartet, Clements argues however that the intersection of music and literature is not on the level of plot or on a linear conception of the novel’s structure but solely on the level of characterization:

Woolf’s structure is not exactly the same as Beethoven’s six movements: there are nine episodes and ten interludes – if one includes the final italicized sentence. But in this novel that reconfigures novelistic form by reinventing the concept of ‘character’ and splintering it into six interconnected consciousnesses, the very concept of separate ‘movements’ is undermined […]. In Woolf’s reworking of the formal method for the novel, the six subjectivities become the structure; ‘character’ and form are indivisible. Thus although the novel’s overall construction is not analogous to the arrangement of Beethoven’s String Quartet, the model of six intertwined subjectivities is\textsuperscript{58}.

\textsuperscript{57} Gerald Levin, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{58} Elicia Clements, “Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf’s \textit{The Waves}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 166.
On first reading, Clements is quite persuasive – the detailed parallels she draws between the characters of the movements and the personalities of the characters are logical and compelling, in particular her "musical" outlines of Louis, Jinny, Rhoda, Susan and Bernard's characters – all of which, as she points out, are themselves directly associated in the novel with one form of music or another, thus allowing Clements to make them correspond very clearly to the musical characteristics of the quartet's movements she argues they were directly modelled on. As she herself will write: "each movement in Beethoven's quartet, as mentioned, can be associated with the six subjectivities which inhabit The Waves, with very little stretch of the imagination".59 From a musical point of view, unlike Levin, Clements admirably avoids most controversial "interpretations" of Beethoven, remaining carefully within the sphere of relatively neutral descriptions of the actual musical techniques brought into play in Beethoven's score. She does not attempt to give any "meaning" to Beethoven's music, though, as we shall see, certain problematical hermeneutic points will arise from her association of words and music. Whereas Levin will speak of the style of Beethoven's music in terms of "quality of life" and "ongoing experience",60 Clements will sagely describe the music in purely musical terms, in particular, the way Beethoven plays with the listeners' expectations by thwarting musical conventions as well as the way he creates varied musical textures through intense sonic "contrasts". Thus, of the Adagio ma non troppo opening of Beethoven's quartet, she will write a very conventional and straightforward piece of musical analysis by describing the music in a neutral way:

The first movement of Opus 130 is in sonata-form, yet it toys with that structure by playing with conventions, which, as in Woolf's novel, set up expectations that are then repeatedly questioned. Although the movement maintains a traditional notion of formal order, it subtly subverts the arrangement of such parts in the process by, for example, deemphasizing the entry of the second, lower fugal subject. This five-note melody [cf. 2\textsuperscript{nd} violin, bars 15-16] also plays with rhythm in the context of the conventional beats in a 4/4 bar; the phrase enters on a 'weak' beat (the second one) [bar 15], yet paradoxically contains the dynamic marking of forte, while the higher note to which the melody leads, which lands on the typically 'strong' first beat of the bar, is destabilized

\footnotesize

59 ibid., p. 168.
60 Gerald Levin, op.cit., p. 221.

250
with a piano marking [bar 16]. The effect is to unsettle expectations about rhythm and accent as well as counterpoint.61

This is quite a good description of the opening page of the first movement of op. 130 (see Figure 10):

Figure 10. Beethoven, op. 130, mvt I, Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro, bars 1-19

When she does “interpret” the music in extra-musical terms, in particular when reading social values into Beethoven’s score, she is only highlighting the way Beethoven himself is playing with conventional musical meanings, for instance the

implicit reference to the social milieu of ballroom dancing in his fourth movement, a delicate ‘waltz’ theme in 3/8 metre, ‘alla danza Tedesca’⁶² (in the manner of a German dance). From the musicological point of view, Clements remains well within the boundaries of an uncontroversial and acceptable analysis (or description) of Beethoven’s style.

Because the circumstantial evidence, as Clements notes herself, is quite “scant”⁶³ and though hinting at intermediality, provides us with insufficient proof of the sort of precise one-to-one correspondences Clements is arguing for, Clements’ discussion of the musicality of The Waves is articulated as a conglomerate of small argumentative points determined by a correlation of textual and musical examples from which she builds up her case. As we have already pointed out, the only clear-cut evidence we have of a link between a specific Beethoven quartet and the novel is Woolf’s conception of Bernard’s final role within the novel in terms of the music of a “Beethoven quartet” (D3: 339), later specified as op. 133 (D4: 5). Clements proceeded to establish links between the other characters and the movements of op. 130 by mutual affinities and progressive elimination, her argumentation being more or less convincing as the cases go. From the intermedial point of view, Clements draws parallels both on a thematic plane as well as on a formal level by establishing what she argues are actual intermedial correspondences between text and music. On several occasions Clements will associate passages in the novel, in particular what she calls the “musical moments” because they explicitly refer to music, with specific bars from Beethoven’s score, taking these as proof of direct musicalization and intermediality. She thus establishes one-to-one correspondences between textual elements and musical elements without however realizing that what she is often presenting as facts are in fact hypotheses. One of the major drawbacks of her study thus comes from the fact that she assumes without question that her thesis is faultless and logical when it is in fact far from being unproblematical as it is founded on a complex web of hypotheses. If you break one down, the rest of her argumentation also collapses and this makes for a very tenuous thesis. It remains to be asked, to what extent is

⁶² Beethoven wrote a few movements with the indication “alla Tedesca”, all in triple meter (cf. his piano sonata op. 79 in G Major, the first movement ‘Presto, alla Tedesca’ is written in ¾) – the term refers to a traditional German peasant dance which was to become in the nineteenth century a ballroom dance: the waltz (cf. Cliff Eisen, ‘German Dance’, Grove Music Online, op.cit.).

Clements’ position tenable and what does it tell us about the process of the novel’s musicalization? Clements’ paper is interesting not for the thesis which she is putting forward and which is more than debatable as we shall see below, but mainly because it provides us with an example of one the most detailed intermedial study of *The Waves* yet attempted and our critical analysis of her work will test the validity of her approach whilst at the same time serving to highlight a certain number of typical interdisciplinary methodological faults which finally undermine her whole investigation.

From a thematic point of view, music is seen primarily by Clements to be a model for one of the novel’s themes: the reconfiguration of social interactions, defined in terms of “inclusion” and “exclusion”.* Musical counterpoint, in particular as exemplified in Beethoven’s late works, is for Clements the model for Woolf’s “thematic and structural material [which] emulates simultaneous separation and correlation”. It is undeniable that from the purely literary point of view, Susan and Jinny can be seen to be at one with their social context, whilst the more eccentric and unconventional characters, Neville, Louis and Rhoda, feel more or less “excluded” from society. Bernard and Percival are for their part defined in terms of both inclusion and exclusion, though Clements does not actually include Percival in this category but interestingly argues that his silence and his exclusion from the “speaking” soliloquies has a similar function to the original *Allegro* sixth movement which replaced the too avant garde ‘Grosse Fugue’ but which was subsequently discarded in modern performances which reverted to playing the original version, thus itself becoming like Percival a ghostly, “silent”, excluded movement. What she does not say, though, is that Percival exists only through the eyes of the other six characters and thus becomes a part of them, his personality the sum of their individual gazes. In which way the *Allegro* movement could also play this role though is particularly unclear and this is

---

64 ibid., p. 175.
65 ibid., p. 164.
66 The *Allegro* movement contains a current of underlying irony and subversion which underpins its superficially “conventional” style. Though we cannot go into any detail of how the second version of the sixth movement subtly subverts convention, we may nevertheless point out a strange chromatic unison passage (bars 210-233) which marks a strong contrast with the otherwise very simple “tune” of the melodic line and thus echoes the intense unison chromaticism of the opening of the ‘Grosse Fugue’. Also to be noted, the (too?) conventional final perfect cadence played *ff*, which could be taken as a sort of ironical *pied-de-nez* on Beethoven’s part addressed to those critics who rejected his more experimental style.
perhaps why Clements does not go further into the matter. Clements will justify her position throughout her study by referring to the “musical moments” in which the notions of inclusion and exclusion appear in the context of the characters’ various musical experiences. The theme of social inclusion/exclusion is therefore put in parallel by Clements with her interpretation of the music of Beethoven’s op. 130/133. By considering this quartet as a whole in which all movements are understood in relation to each other, she highlights how the movements themselves interact in terms of musical inclusion/exclusion. As we have said, the persuasiveness of Clements’ argumentation is thus directly proportional to the convincing nature of the sum of her small points. To test her theory, we must therefore look more closely at each point of her argumentation in turn in order to test the validity of her whole analysis. For our present purposes, it will suffice to look closely at Clements’ interdisciplinary methodology in her approach to Woolf’s musicalization of Louis’, Susan’s and Bernard’s characters as they each exemplify the three major aspects of Clements’ argument: exclusion, inclusion, and integration. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, we give a summary of all the detailed correspondences Clements establishes between op. 130/133 and The Waves in Appendix 8.

• Bernard as the “Grosse Fugue”, op. 133

Bernard is one of the easiest characters to “map” against Beethoven’s quartet as Woolf linked his final soliloquy directly to the music of the op. 133 ‘Grosse Fugue’. Clements will therefore argue that like his musical counterpart, the op. 133 fugue, he “finds a way to maintain inclusion and exclusion simultaneously, unlike the others who function as only one part of the whole either inside or outside their social circumstances”. 68 Not only are the movements of the quartet thematically interrelated (Clements relies here on Barbara R. Barry’s views on Beethoven), just as the six speaking voices overlap and intersect throughout the novel, but Bernard will come to centralize and play one against another the otherwise divergent experiences of his friends, just as the themes and melodic fragments of the first five movements will reappear in the counterpointed textures of the ‘Grosse Fugue’:

68 *ibid.*, p. 175.
The quartet and the novel both interlink the structures that constitute the whole. According to Barbara R. Barry, "The Grosse Fuge is conceptually related to the third, fourth and fifth movements, and even more, the fugue subject is demonstrably related to the opening Adagio, ma non troppo of the first movement" (356). The movements in Beethoven's quartet speak to, reflect, and invert each other; Woolf's "contested subjectivity[ies]" interact similarly.69

If Bernard's musical moment (W, 182) can indeed be said, though rather loosely, that it "emulates the music of Opus 133 [by] incorporating 'concord' and 'discord' into a symphony"70 in a way similar to that of the fugue which incorporates and develops themes taken from the preceding five movements, Louis' description of the eating-house hubbub in terms of the Presto, on the other hand, will be taken by Clements as an example of musical "exclusion" whilst Susan's Andante con moto ma non troppo movement will be understood in terms of inclusion only. Whereas it is quite convincing to hear the op. 133 fugue as a centralizing, all-encompassing movement whose role in the quartet is to give, like Bernard's final soliloquy, "the effect of the whole" (W, 182) by merging the preceding thematic and harmonic materials into one final concluding movement in which no one instrument predominates and no one theme takes over, thus "summing up" the expressive qualities of the whole quartet, it is however far more difficult to see how Clements perceives the other movements as models of either "inclusion" or "exclusion". This leads Clements into a far more dangerous interdisciplinary territory by raising problematical interpretations of Beethoven if not of The Waves.

- **Louis as the Presto (op. 130)**

In the novel, Louis is without doubt depicted in terms of "otherness" – both ashamed and proud of his Australian accent and background ("My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent. [...] Jinny and Susan, Bernard and Neville bind themselves into a thong with which to lash me. They laugh at my neatness, at my Australian accent." W, 14) which singles him out and excludes him

---

69 ibid., p. 166.
from the English society in which he is living, as opposed to Jinny, for instance, who needs the admiring gaze of others to exist and thus draws people towards her life revolving round parties and balls and social gatherings ("Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world." W, 73). Louis’ character will be taken by Clements as an example of “exclusion” and she will read him in parallel with the second Presto movement of op. 130, basing her choice of movement chiefly by drawing an analogy between what she terms the “stomping effect” of a pervasive three-note pattern in the music and Louis’s “refrain”, a “three-patterned stamp, stamp, stamp”:

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’ (W, 6)

According to Clements, this refrain “marks out a surprisingly similar rhythm to the one that dominates the Presto and trio”.71 As she herself says, this sort of parallel can be made “with very little stretch of the imagination” by even the most “unperceptive listener”72 and for this reason she considers her point as taken, her first hypothesis surreptitiously becoming fact. But to a more perceptive listener, the three-note motif of the Presto is hardly expressive of a heavy stomping. It gives on the contrary in performance a leggiero effect, and even though undeniably punctuating the violin’s melodic line, it does so in a very subtle and delicate way: played staccato at a minimum tempo of 160 à la brève, it cannot be played heavily. The following excerpt shows the first bars of the trio section in which the three-note motif is the most apparent. In the opening section (see Figure 11, bars 3-4 and 7-8), the motif only punctuates the very endings of the phrases. In the following passage the three-note motif can be seen punctuating the melody of the violin in second half of each bar, played simultaneously by the second violin, viola and cello:

---

71 ibid., p. 169.
72 ibid., p. 168.
Figure 11. Beethoven op. 130, mvt II, *Presto*, bars 17-29 (opening of Trio section)

If we go a step further, it becomes even more difficult to see how the music reflects her interpretation of Louis’ “stamping” refrain as a token of his “angry dissatisfaction with life”. It is true that at one point in the transition from the trio section to the recapitulation of the opening passage, the three-note motif could be heard on two occasions as a perhaps aggressive musical “gesture”, not to stay “stomp”, played at a slightly slower tempo by the second violin, viola and cello in unison and *staccato* in a low register, thus cutting through the downward melodic *legato* line played by the solo violin bars 56 and 60, thus delaying the cadence and the entry of the main theme (bar 94) – but it is very difficult to condone a reading of this moment as expressing an “angry dissatisfaction with life”: 

257
Clements’ next point concerns Louis’ “musical moment”. The passage in question from *The Waves* runs as follows:

Meanwhile the hats bob up and down; the door perpetually shuts and opens. I am conscious of flux, of disorder, of annihilation and despair. If this is all, this is worthless. Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. (*W*, 67)

She takes this passage as an instance of what Werner Wolf would call “imaginary content analogy”, exemplifying an actual melopoetic transposition from music to words, specifically transforming into words the effect of the opening bars of Beethoven’s second *Presto* movements:73

---

73 online score downloaded from http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/.
Basing herself on her first hypothesis that Louis’s character was based on the *Presto*, Clements will put forward a second hypothesis and write of this narrative moment that it “perform[s] the up, down, and whirling movements of the melodic material in the *Presto*”, describing it further as a “waltz, a dance tune that will surface again with Jinny”. Concerning her musical interpretation of the “up, down, and whirling movements” of Louis’ description of the ballet of waitresses in terms of the opening bars of the *Presto*, it leads us to ask, what melodic line does not go “up” and “down”? Her musical insight is so general if not simplistic in this instance, that the parallels cannot help but fit and thus become in the same instant particularly unconvincing as these characteristics could correspond to any piece of music and not just the Beethoven quartet movements in question. We highlighted this very point in our chapter on the links between Woolf’s ‘String Quartet’ and various Mozart string quartets. The same goes for her view that the *Presto* expresses extremes and contrasts: many if not all pieces of music in general play on the notions of variations of sonic textures, contrasts within the musical material as well as harmonic extremes of consonance and dissonance. The presence of sonic contrasts in music are the norm rather than the exception in musical composition and it is hardly surprising if all the Beethoven movements reflect this. Of the first movement of op. 130, she will speak of “the contrast between the two main themes of this first movement as a sedate and

---

75 ibid.
peaceful beginning is suddenly interrupted by a burst of sound announcing the divergent second theme, \(^{76}\) whilst the second movement exemplifies extremes of dynamics, \(^{77}\) the *Andante con moto* "encapsulates\[es\] topsy-turvy contrast" of "moods", \(^{78}\) the *Cavatina* contains a "(famously) contrasting middle section". \(^{79}\) The fugue, on the other hand, expresses (also rather famously, it may be added) extremes of consonance and dissonance. \(^{80}\) As Bernard describes human relations and character in terms of "concord" and "discord" (*W*, 82), this fits Clements' theory very neatly but is hardly a convincing argument to prove op. 130/133 is behind *The Waves*. One of the main problems Clements must have encountered in her analysis of Louis' character in terms of the *Presto* was his mention of the "waltz" motion of the eating-house activity. Luckily for her, the *Presto*'s trio section is written in a ternary time-signature and that was quite enough for Clements. I must admit however that it is particularly far-fetched to hear in the *alla breve* opening section from the *Presto* of op. 130 the ternary rhythms of a waltz in the way Clements outlines and even though the trio section is written in a ternary 6/4 time signature (see Figure 11 above), one would beat (and hear) the trio as a binary two-in-a-bar or even a one-in-a-bar considering the fast tempo. All the musical phrases of the piece (including the trio section) are built according to binary and not ternary principles, most phrases being divided into two four-bar periods (bars 1 to 4, 5 to 8 for the first phrase, 9 to 12, 13 to 16 for the second phrase, 17 to 20, 21 to 24 for the first phrase of the trio section, etc.), themselves subdivided into two bar sections, each phrase being repeated twice. Other distinctive musical characteristics of the waltz are nowhere to be found (i.e. a strong first beat followed usually by two weaker beats, etc.). As Clements notes herself, the central 6/4 section is played far to fast to be danced to but whereas we find that this undermines any interpretation of it in terms of a "waltz", she takes this on the contrary to be representative of Louis' "exclusion", as if the *Presto* "waltz" were excluded from its genre by not being a proper waltz one could dance to:

\(^{76}\) *ibid.*, p. 168.
\(^{77}\) *ibid.*, p. 169.
\(^{78}\) *ibid.*, p. 170-171.
\(^{79}\) *ibid.*, p. 172.
\(^{80}\) *ibid.*, p. 174.
as in Beethoven’s version, the dance of the metropolis is too fast for Louis to move to, so he is not integrated into its ‘central rhythm’.

This seems to be a very questionable interpretation of the Presto. Not all pieces written in ternary rhythm are necessarily waltzes or have anything to do with dancing, nor is it given that Virginia Woolf heard the movement as a waltz whose tempo excludes it from being danced to, thus giving her a model for Louis’ exclusion from society, nor is it credible to believe that Beethoven wrote here a speeded-up waltz “about” waltzes. Do we hear in Clements’ words a faint echo of the discredited Goodman-Beardsley theory of exemplification? As Peter Kivy will argue,

the Goodman-Beardsley theory of exemplification gives us a machinery for generating “aboutness” in regard to any quality a piece of music can be said to exemplify, which amounts to any quality a piece of music can possess qua music. Is it a minuet? Then it exemplifies “minuettiness,” and hence is about minuets (or about dances?). Does it resolve to the tonic? Then it exemplifies resolution and hence is “about” it. Is it turbulent music? Then. ... And so on in infinitum.

As the derogatory tone of these comments reveals, Kivy, a self-proclaimed “enhanced formalist”, will of course reject the “aboutness” theory on the grounds that music, to be about anything, would have to say something either truthful, valuable or profound about what it is about, since “naked aboutness is nothing at all”, and he goes on to show quite convincingly that this is not that easy to prove. It therefore appears that Clements’ points do seem a little far-fetched. It does appear here that she is distorting the characteristics of the music in order to fit the text.

- Susan as the Andante con moto ma non troppo (op. 130)

Her study of Susan’s musicality will fall into the same type of interdisciplinary traps, the links between the text and the music even more tenuous than with Louis. Clements will associate Susan’s personality with the third movement of the quartet by
referring to a passage in the opening scene of the novel in which Susan runs away into the woods, upset at having seen Jinny kiss Louis:

"Susan has passed us," said Bernard. "She has passed the tool-house door with her handkerchief screwed into a ball. She was not crying, but her eyes, which are so beautiful, were narrow as cats' eyes before they spring. [...] Now she walks across the field with a swing, nonchalantly, to deceive us. (W, 10)

Just as Susan's moods change rapidly, the "mood" of the Andante movement is perceived by Clements to act in a similar way even though this can only be said to be true of the first three bars of the piece. These bars, of course, will be the focus of Clements' analysis as she sees the above extract from the text as an actual intermedial transposition of the opening bars of the third movement of op. 130 which she describes thus:

The third movement of Opus 130 begins with pathos but quickly moves to playful fun. The heading Andante con moto ma non troppo, which means a walking pace with motion but not too fast, seems to "hedge its own bets," so to speak (Steinberg 233) Encapsulating topsy-turvy contrast, the movement begins slowly in B-flat minor but then turns quite suddenly to the cheerfully paced D-flat major of a Poco scherzoso (meaning a little jokingly) marked dolce (sweetly). Again, Beethoven encourages the listener's expectations but quickly dashes them. [...] Emulating the beginning of the Andante, Susan's wish to deceive her playmates and her cheerful, undulating walk perform actions similar to Beethoven's opening few bars that mislead listener expectations.85

Clements' description of Beethoven as such cannot be faulted but her simplistic association of the music with Woolf's text certainly can, and this is even more apparent if we map Clements' points against Beethoven's score and the full extent of Clements' rather ludicrous and far-fetched parallel reading emerges: the slow ponderous opening section (see section A in diagram below) in a dark minor key is made by Clements to represent Susan's inner turmoil, immediately superseded (in section B) by a sudden cheerful mood given by the "lighthearted" melodic line and

the “jolly little sewing-machine sort of figure” in the accompaniment, suggesting the deceptive happiness of Susan’s nonchalant walk. The contrast between sections A and B taken by Clements to represent Susan’s “refrain”: I hate (i.e. A) and I love (i.e. B):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan’s inner turmoil</td>
<td>false cheerfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I hate”</td>
<td>“I love”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“lighthearted” melody played by viola
Susan’s deceptive “happy” countenance

semi-quavers played by cello
give the illusion of a faster tempo whereas the ‘Alberti bass’ gives the impression of a “swinging” motion
Susan’s “nonchalant”, “swinging” walk

Clements is here suggesting that Woolf herself made these correlations between the music and her story, that Woolf actually modelled Susan’s nonchalant walk, her “I hate, I love” refrain on the score in the way Clements outlined. As for Susan’s “musical moment”, it occurs later on in the novel and highlights her perception of a “music” of natural sounds, in particular the sounds Susan hears on her farm:

Sleep I sing – I, who am unmelodious and hear no music save rustic music when a dog barks, a bell tinkles, or wheels crunch upon the gravel. I sing my song by the fire like an old shell murmuring on the beach (W, 122)

How was Clements to explain this suggestion of a “rustic” music in the Andante? Skirting on very thin ice, she will focus on the varied articulations present in

---

Beethoven's work, arguing that they were what suggested to Woolf, Susan's music of "noises":

Like the assorted articulations from the *Andante* that include the *legato*, *pizzicato*, and *staccato*, the various farm sounds of barks, tinkles, and crunches imitate Beethoven's music while they thematize an "unmelodious" yet natural version of vocality.\(^87\)

But the articulations of the *Andante* can hardly be equated to farmyard "noises" or even strange sounds, however stylized one may take them to be and the *staccato*, *legato* and *pizzicato* of this movement are not in any case particularly noticeable or exceptional. One of the major implications of Clements' paper which her analysis of Susan's character reveals most acutely is that Virginia Woolf must have had Beethoven's op. 130/133 quartet in mind from the very start of her work on the novel in 1927 since Clements insists that each character was modelled on a movement from Beethoven's quartet. The passage when Susan runs away into the woods which Clements reads in parallel with the opening bars from the *Andante* was first written by Virginia Woolf on page 13 of the first holograph draft, that is, probably as early as August or September 1929 (cf. Appendix 7, chronology of the writing of *The Waves*). In the original versions, Bernard does not describe Susan's walk as "nonchalant" or with a "swing" – two characteristics Clements links to Beethoven's score - and it seems very far-fetched that Woolf would have added these adjectives *a posteriori* to simply fit the music of the *Andante* without ever then explicitly mentioning her source in the novel.

- **Clements' conclusions**

Just as Clements' reading of Woolf's musicalization of Louis' character went far beyond credibility, her even more problematic interpretation of Susan's "musicality" shows us to what extent a critic studying the musicalization of fiction can subtly distort the actual facts of the texts or scores in question in order to prove their theories. Even if Clements' hypotheses were convincing and proven to be true, it remains to be asked, what is the purpose of this particular type of musicalization?

\(^{87}\) *ibid.*, p.171.
Clements will fail to address this question other than in a vague way, concluding by saying:

The interchange between musical sound and narrative enables Woolf to reconceptualize both the notions of subjectivity and ‘form’, and in the process produce an aesthetic product that not only depicts alternative social models but also performs them through intermedial exchange. [...] Ultimately, in Bernard’s final soliloquy music is thematized but so too is it enacted; life is music, for “each played his own tune.” [...] For Woolf, music – and Beethoven’s in particular – does not transcend life, nor does the figure of the artist. Instead, “we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself” (Moments of Being 72).88

Like Schulze, Clements will finish on a quotation from Woolf herself, indeed one of the most renowned and oft-quoted passages from Woolf’s autobiographical sketches, but also one of the most cryptic and broad declarations of melopoetic intent by this author, and one which needs far closer scrutiny than that accorded to it by either critics. Leaving the last word to Woolf could be perhaps thought-provoking, but in this case, it seems to be simply an evasion of the question of the far-reaching significance of Woolf’s musicalization and hardly a satisfactory ending to a scholarly investigation.

It would be superfluous to go into Clements’ paper in any more detail as we can find similar objections as we did above for most of her arguments concerning the musicalization of the other characters of the novel. To summarize, it seems very unlikely that Virginia Woolf did take Beethoven’s op. 130 quartet as basis for her novel in the way Clements suggests, in particular as it was only towards the end of her work that “a” Beethoven quartet possibly inspired her to merge the interjected passages into Bernard’s final speech (cf. D3: 339) and however detailed, Clements music/literary parallels do not stand up to close scrutiny. If Woolf had had op. 130 in mind from the start to the extent which Clements suggests, Woolf would not have written this particular remark in her diary in a manner which suggests rather that she was listening at the time to a random Beethoven quartet. Whereas the link between op. 133 and Bernard’s final soliloquy is quite strong (cf. in particular the diary entry for the 7th of January 1931 (D4: 5)) to the point of justifying an analysis of the role

88 ibid., p. 175-176.
and expression of the final episode in musical terms as we shall ourselves see below in our own study, I would however reject Clements’ attempt at coupling each movement with each of the other characters in the manner which she does. Though interesting in itself, the idea that the music of op. 130/131 was a way for Woolf to “reconceptualize” the notions of form through her innovative handling of her six subjectivities, it does seem that the discrepancy between the form of the novel and the form of the quartet is too marked to be ignored. That Woolf may have heard the Beethoven quartet in terms of six personalities, the sixth (op. 133) being itself a centralizing all-encompassing personality and that she should have chosen to create a character (or rather, an episode) whose role in the novel was similar to that of op. 133 in the quartet, is a possibility we would be loath to reject without further scrutiny, but to correlate, like Clements attempts to do, the five other movements to the five fragmented and interwoven lives is more problematical. As Clements noticed, each character has at one point in the novel what she calls a “musical moment”, that is, an event which is either associated or linked with a musical performance (like Rhoda’s Wigmore Hall concert experience) or described in musical terms, but Neville, for instance, does not have a “musical moment” as such. The association she makes between his character and the first movement of op. 130 is very superficial (cf. appendix 8). Neither does she take into account the relative lengths of all the movements – the first movement which she associates very tenuously with Neville is approximately 13 minutes long whereas the second movement, the base for Louis’s personality, only 2 minutes long. The difference in length is however not reflected in any way in the text itself, Neville being given by Woolf as much weight as Louis. Elicia Clements takes Virginia Woolf’s diary entry in which she observed she was going to “merge all the interjected passages into Bernard’s final speech” after having listened to “a Beethoven quartet” (D3: 339) as pertaining to the entirety of Bernard’s final soliloquy, and indeed, without checking the holograph drafts, it is quite easy to jump to such a conclusion. Clements does so with no hesitation, without realizing that the entry actually only refers to the last few pages of The Waves. This puts into question yet again her endeavour to collate the text with Beethoven’s quartet as a whole. In fact, this diary entry is one of Clements’ few justifications for considering op. 130/133 to have been an actual model for the whole novel. The problem is that if
we take into account Graham’s table of concordances between the diary entries and the drafts, it appears that on the 22 December 1930, the date of the diary entry, was written only 9 days before starting her work on the 9th Episode. But this concerns her rewriting of this episode in her second draft. She had already written Bernard’s final soliloquy in April 1930. The causality which Clements implies is incorrect. Concerning the very end of the novel, interestingly, Clements will have uncannily similar views to Sullivan and Levin in particular in the idea that the op. 133 fugue dramatizes the notion of resolution and was a model for Woolf’s ending. Levin wrote of the conclusion of The Waves that

the novel moves overall through continuous variation, not through a repetition of experiences and perceptions, toward a final “resolution of forces” – without finally achieving it in actual experience. [...] The purpose of musical style in The Waves is to maintain this sense of ongoing experience through a structure that seems never to end. ‘And in me too the wave rises,’ Bernard meditates in the concluding paragraph.

To speak of harmonic resolution is perfectly uncontroversial if one is describing the conventions of tonal language as long as this resolution is not made to represent any symbolic (ontological) resolution. Clements will interpret the musicality of the ending of The Waves as follows:

In terms of melody and harmony, the music [op. 133] often refuses resolution. Closing in on the ending of the Grosse Fuge, for instance, there is a series of unpredictable chord progressions interspersed with five extended silences, creating striking gaps in the musical sound. Woolf’s novel also resists closure, both thematically and technically. Recall the novel’s final words, for instance – “The Waves broke on the shore” – that imply the cyclical and never ending undulation of the waves.

I would further question the fact that the novel’s last phrase is an attempt at “non-closure” as Woolf herself introduced this sentence precisely to make a conclusion to

89 unlike some other entries which Woolf wrote sometimes several weeks later, this entry was written on the day, cf. her note of the newspaper headlines.
91 Gerald Levin, op.cit., p. 222.
the novel: “the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion” (D3: 339). The ending of the ‘Grosse Fugue’ is hardly “open-ended” in the way Clements suggests, the chord progression and the silences on the contrary emphasizing the conclusive nature of the final perfect cadence and not suggestive of a resistance to closure. Without more convincing parallels or a stronger paratextual case for reading the op. 130 movements into the text, in particular for the years between 1927 and 1930 when most of Woolf’s work on the novel was done, Clements analysis lacks foundation and on closer reading, the inconsistencies in her interdisciplinary reading will progressively undermine her whole exposé. A final point against Clements’ reading comes from the mention of Beethoven in Bernard’s final soliloquy which most critics make so much of, taking it to be a declaration of intent.93 What is however problematical is that they often do so at face value, despite the fact that such interdisciplinary evidence need always be treated with extreme caution and scepticism. Not one of these critics thought of going to check the holograph drafts. The reference may indeed have some melopoetic bearing on Bernard’s final soliloquy but could not possibly have anything to do with the rest of the novel: no scholars have realized up to date that this reference, not only on one but on two occasions, in the first and second holograph drafts, was made in fact to Brahms and not to Beethoven.

(iii) Other melopoetic readings of The Waves: literature, opera and ballet

- From the Woolfian Wagnerians...

If the first two approaches to Woolf’s musicality that we analyzed above favoured direct cross-readings between text and music, other melopoetic readings of Woolf’s experimental novel are foremost thematic rather than stylistic and merit a mention if only to show the shortcomings of a type of melopoetic reading which has a tendency to shun what is specifically musical about music by referring to hybrid forms of musical expression which themselves draw upon literature and dramatic representation to convey their meaning: opera and ballet.

93 ibid., p. 164-165.
Virginia Woolf’s interdisciplinary interest in Wagner’s music and style cannot be ignored and we have already touched upon the matter elsewhere⁹⁴ but her Wagnerism must necessarily be qualified by the fact that she did not always show an unadulterated admiration for his music. It does appear that even on her trip to Bayreuth in 1909, she preferred the music of Strauss to Wagner, a composer new to her at that time, writing to her sister Vanessa:

We went to Salome, (Strauss, as you may know) last night. I was much excited, and believe that it is a new discovery. He gets great emotion into his music, without any beauty. However, Saxon [Sydney-Turner] thought we were encroaching upon Wagner, and we had a long and rather acid discussion. (L1: 410)

A few years later, in 1913, Woolf will hear Wagner’s Ring cycle performed in London at Covent Garden accompanied by her husband Leonard Woolf rather than the fervent Wagnerian Sydney-Turner, and she will at that point be particularly critical of Wagner’s style, finding his music overemphatic, tiring and boring:

my eyes are bruised, my ears dulled, my brain a mere pudding of pulp – O the noise, the heat, & the bawling sentimentality, which used once to carry me away, & now leaves me sitting perfectly still.⁹⁵

Whether this was however a reflection on the interpretation she heard or on her mood of the moment, whether she had always disliked his music but had not wished to upset or contradict Sydney-Turner, or whether she was influenced at that point by Leonard Woolf,⁹⁶ is a matter for debate. Wagner is only mentioned once in the paratextual

---

⁹⁴ see chapter 1.
⁹⁶ Leonard Woolf was particularly anti-Wagnerian, as the following passage from his autobiography reveals:

Bayreuth recalls another motif of the autumn of 1911. Among the frequenters of the Russian Ballet there was, strangely enough, a vogue for Wagner - strangely because one can hardly imagine two products of the human mind and soul more essentially hostile. Virginia and Adrian with Saxon Sydney-Turner used to go, almost ritualistically, to the great Wagner festival at Bayreuth, as Hugh Walpole and many others did later. It was, I think, Saxon who in our circle was the initiator or leader of the Wagner cult; the operas appealed to him, partly because, as I explained in *Sowing*, he collected them as if they were postage stamps, and partly because the intricate interweaving of the 'themes' gave scope to his extraordinary ingenuity in solving riddles; spotting the Wotan or Siegfried theme interweaving with the fire music theme gave him the same kind of pleasure as that from fitting the right piece into a picture puzzle or solving a crossword puzzle. In 1911 I knew nothing about Wagner, but I saw that it was time for me to set about him seriously. I therefore took a box in Covent Garden for the Ring in October, and Virginia came to Das Rheingold,
material at the time she had been writing *The Waves*, and never directly in the novel itself, unlike the Wagnerian episodes in *Jacob’s Room*, *Night and Day* and *The Years*, for instance, where one or other of his operas actually feature at length in the story. In September 1927 however, three months after having first sketched ‘The Moths’, Woolf noted in her diary that Quentin Bell “wont let us play him Wagner: prefers Bach”, a sign that both Leonard and Virginia Woolf did still listen to Wagner on the gramophone or wireless during those years. It is both surprising and predictable that critics have endeavoured to read Wagnerian borrowings into Woolf’s 1931 novel — surprising inasmuch as the novel shows no clear signs of having been based on Wagner’s operas or musical style and predictable considering the wealth of references to Wagner in Woolf’s other fictional works and critical writings.

Many authors of the twentieth century expressed unconditional admiration and interest in a composer whom they felt had revolutionized the nature of artistic expression. Wagner is a composer whose interdisciplinary importance is not to be (and has never been) underestimated. His project of creating a “Gesammtkunstwerk” which effected a fusion of music, drama and literature certainly contributed to the subsequent Modernist interest in the possible intersections of these arts. The devices which Wagner relied upon in his own works to give them unity and cohesion were particularly influential across the literary world, from Thomas Mann’s experimental musical novels in Germany to the poetry of the French “Symbolistes” and the *début-du-siècle* stream of consciousness novels of Edouard Dujardin and Marcel Proust, to the works of James Joyce in Ireland, D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw or E.M. Forster in England.97 It could be said that most if not all writers of that period would have, at one point or another in their careers, come across, if not

---

*Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*, with Adrian and Rupert Brooke to *Die Walküre*. It was a formidible experience: the operas started in the afternoon and ended after 11, and we used to go back after them to supper in Fitzroy Square. I am glad that I sat through those four operas of the *Ring*: though I have never had the courage or desire to do it again. I see that in its way the *Ring* is a masterpiece, but I dislike it and dislike Wagner and his art. There are passages in *Das Rheingold*, *Walküre*, and *Götterdämmerung* of considerable beauty and it is occasionally moving and exciting, but I find it intolerably monotonous and boring. The Germans in the 19th century developed a tradition, a philosophy of life and art, barbarous, grandiose, phoney. Wagner was both cause and effect of this repulsive process which ended in the apogee and apotheosis of human bestiality and degradation, Hitler and the Nazis. There are, as I said, moments of beauty and excitement in the *Ring*; there is still more, perhaps, to be said for the early Wagner, as in *Lohengrin*, and for the *Meistersinger*, But I did not enjoy the *Ring* in my box, with Virginia by my side, in 1911, and *Tristan* and *Parsifal* when I came to hear them repelled me and far outdid the *Ring* in tediousness and monotony. (*Beginning Again an autobiography of the years 1911-1918*. Leonard Woolf, London: Hogarth Press, 1968, p. 49)

contemplated, Wagnerian methods. Virginia Woolf, as we know, was no exception. One of the first to bring up Woolf’s Wagnerism was William Blisset in 1963. He will conduct a survey entitled ‘Wagnerian Fiction in English’, briefly including Virginia Woolf in his investigation. Like Jane Marcus in her article on another of Woolf’s novels, *The Years*, which she reads in parallel with Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, and DiGaetani’s study of the Wagnerian ‘mythic characterization’ of Woolf’s novels, Blisset will find the “mythical method” more important than the musical. As DiGaetani will argue, “Woolf’s borrowings from Wagner’s *Ring* make her novel reverberate with epic implications that it would otherwise lack”. Indeed, the strongest link to Wagner in *The Waves* is not technical or stylistic but thematic, i.e. Woolf’s naming of one of her more mysterious silent characters, termed by Blisset as her “hidden hero”, ‘Percival’. As Blisset will argue, his name “hearken[s] back, across the *Waste Land*, to *Parsifal*” and highlights the Christian symbolism of the farewell dinner, a “grail feast” in honour of Percival, the “young swan-hunter”, who takes pride of place at the centre of the table. Of the musical aspect of the borrowings, Blisset will simply say that

the use of thematic images develops a momentum of its own and reaches its culmination in *The Waves* (1931), the most Wagnerian of Virginia Woolf’s novels because the most despotically organized, the most ‘composite’ in its use of musical and painterly, even sculpturesque and ballet-like effects, and the most pervasively leitmotivistic in its structure and symbolism: the waves play an endless melody. We know that the novel was conceived and composed musically, symbolic objects in sequence taking precedence over both characters and plot-outline.

True, Virginia Woolf had set upon writing a set piece in which all elements were symbolically linked (cf. *D4*: 10-11) but this is hardly a sign of a musical or Wagnerian conception. Blisset’s musical appreciation of the text is impressionistic, to say the

103 *ibid.*, p. 257.
least. Di Gaetani, noting the superficial and inconclusive nature of Blisset’s remarks, proposes to “start where Blissett left off, by investigating why the allusions are there and what artistic purpose they serve”. This appears more promising and one would expect yet again, a more rigorous study of the question, but DiGaetani does not waver from a purely thematic reading of Woolf’s Wagnerian novel. Percival is yet again equated to Wagner’s mythic hero Parsifal. For DiGaetani, Wagner’s opera, *Parsifal*, enables Woolf to portray the complex nature of her hero. Here her task is especially difficult because we never enter Percival’s mind directly nor hear him speak. Given his lack of immediacy, the many parallels with Wagner’s Parsifal help Woolf to dramatize the dual characteristics of sacrifice and resurrection in her own Percival. The heroic and mythic dimensions of her hero become both explained and enhanced by his similarity to Wagner’s Parsifal. 

Whether Woolf had Wagner in mind or simply the myth of Parsifal in general remains a problem which DiGaetani raises. Percival is no doubt described in the novel as “heroic” (*W*, 111), and he does indeed fill a “heroic” role, as DiGaetani observes, but more significantly from the melopoetic point of view, he will be at one moment associated with music by Bernard:

> Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting song, Percival’s music; but a painful guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song. (*W*, 177)

That Parsifal sings a hunting song in Wagner’s opera in Act I is of course duly noted by both Blisset and DiGaetani who take this one textual reference as a proof of direct intermedial influence. Even so, it remains throughout a “thematic” borrowing, less interdisciplinary than intertextual. Strangely enough, DiGaetani will find another parallel, not between *The Waves* and *Parsifal*, an opera which he only sees to have contributed to Percival’s name and his personality, but between the interludes and *Der
*Ring des Nibelungen*, Wagner’s vast tetralogy, in particular the Wagnerian aspect of the thematic recurrence of the cyclical movement of the waves and the progression of the sun and day during the interludes:

the high point of the *Ring*, the last scene of *Siegfried* when Brünnhilde and Siegfried are first in love, is reflected in the bright sunshine Wagner puts in his stage directions. *The Waves* is structured similarly, with high noon for the central section of the novel. The artistic effect of this circular structure is similar in both works.\(^{109}\)

The parallelism with Wagner’s *Ring* cycle is, for DiGaetani, compounded by the emphasis in the novel on images of “rings” of all sorts, from Bernard’s quivering “ring” (\(W, 6\)), Louis’ forging of a “ring of steel” (\(W, 28\)), Rhoda’s vision of Miss Lambert’s glowing purple ring (\(W, 24\)), the “ring” of sound of Susan’s soaring lark (\(W, 122\)), etc., thus “ provid[ing] a parallel with the circular structure, water imagery, lighting descriptions, and ring symbolism in the novel and thereby giv[ing] it a mythic dimension that it would otherwise lack”:\(^{110}\)

One basic meaning of a ring, its circular form symbolizing a circular concept of life’s progression; is used in both *The Waves* and the *Ring*.\(^{111}\)

Again, in this case, the influence would have appeared to have been thematic, if at all, and it remains quite inconclusive that Woolf did in fact have Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in mind when she was writing the novel. I would further argue that in order to have the effect that Blisset and DiGaetani suggest, i.e. give the novel an epic or mythic dimension, the references to Wagner would have needed to be far more explicit and thorough for them to actually suggest to the reader the mythic dimensions of Wagner’s operas. It seems unbelievable that Woolf would have based her novel on no less than four Wagner operas, *Parsifal* and the three operas which comprise the *Ring* cycle, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* especially as the musical borrowings from Wagner which DiGaetani suggests, are purely thematic (and therefore not musical) since they pertain to the myth and not to Wagner’s musical


\(^{110}\) *ibid.*, p. 124.

\(^{111}\) *ibid.*, p. 120.
expression as such. From the mythic angle, it is also highly possible that Virginia Woolf may not have had Wagner in mind at all, but the original myths. She had spent years learning ancient Greek in order to read the Greek plays in their original language and we know from one of her essays that she certainly knew ‘Tristan and Isolde’ from Greek literature rather than Wagner’s interpretation of the myth (E4: 40). It therefore appears that the links between Wagnerian operas and Virginia Woolf’s novel - and this is also the case with studies of Wagnerian borrowings in her other novels - remain tenuous, punctual or thematic. More need not be said at this point as these studies are not precisely dealing with interdisciplinarity between literature and music proper but, if anything, with literature and drama.\(^\text{112}\)

One study, however, needs to be looked at a trifle more closely. In the same way as Elicia Clements wished to go beyond Levin’s unsatisfactory study of Woolf’s borrowings from Beethoven, Gyllian Phillips will endeavour to go beyond the controversial “mythic” parallels and offer a close-reading of *The Waves* and *Parsifal*, relying for her purpose on the musical features of Wagner’s opera by comparing Woolf’s innovative narrative structures to Wagner’s subversion of conventional tonality: “the most fundamental analogy between *The Waves* and *Parsifal* [...] is their ambiguous attitude towards form”.\(^\text{113}\) On the one hand, “the discussion of tonality in a work of music is essentially a discussion of structure – in which the issues of theme, motivic transformation, rhythm, phrasing, and instrumentation play large and related roles”,\(^\text{114}\) on the other hand, in *The Waves*, “like the music of the opera, the novel’s narrative, though held in, is always on the point of dissolving conventional conceptions of time, space, and of course language”.\(^\text{115}\) Thus drawing structural parallels between the two works, Phillips will try and map the novel into the opera:

Both use a clear, simple narrative outline, as closely analogous to ‘natural’ structures as is possible in a discourse. Both follow the rules of syntax to a point [...]. Both even establish areas of apparent distinction between the natural world and the world of language. [...] Both works avoid invoking formulaic expectations of closure within the

---

\(\text{112}\) For this reason, we see it fit not to go into the Wagnerian aspects of Woolf’s other novels in this investigation and refer readers to the bibliography for those studies which do investigate the matter.


\(\text{114}\) *ibid.*, p. 128.

\(\text{115}\) *ibid.*, p. 132.
structure thereby creating a continuous inner tension with no hope of satisfying resolution [...]. Both works use the observed cycles of the natural world to structure their narratives. [...] In both works, this apparently immutable cyclical pattern is undermined even at its apex: the height of the ceremony, the day, is accompanied by the certainty of death. In the opera, Amphortas cries for death, in the form of Parsifal (or as far as he knows, the innocent fool) who is also the bearer of life for the Grail brotherhood [...]. In The Waves, the height of the sun and the very middle of the novel efface the death of Percival whose energy and absence are anticipated in the communion supper of the six friends.116

From these quite general potential thematic parallels which occur on the level of plot, Phillips will move on to the more complex matter of purely musical parallels, and this is what is interesting. The question of the Wagnerian leitmotiv will be exploited to the hilt as she will find similar key events in both opera and novel which will recur throughout the works, in particular the “kiss between Kundry and Parsifal” and Jinny’s kiss in the novel.117 Again, the parallels occur on a narrative level rather than a musical level. She will however finally establish that Wagner’s constant frustration of tonal expectations will play a dramatic role in the opera by undermining the progression of events and thwarting our expectations and this will be mirrored in The Waves by the way Woolf disrupts the forward momentum of her narrative and manipulates the suspension of frustrated completion with a textual process [...] analogous to Wagner’s musical process.118

Phillips is primarily thinking here of the way Woolf plays with the rhythms and sonorities of the language of the narrative itself: “rhythm itself, physically, in the text/performance of both works is itself that artificial and profoundly real time-keeping”.119 Garrett Stewart in particular has pointed out in a linguistic study of Woolf’s novel, the lexical ambiguities which Woolf likes to play with (particularly noticeable in Between the Acts): the symbolic or conventional meanings of words or

116 ibid., p. 129-130.
117 ibid., p. 138-139.
118 ibid., p. 136, see also, p. 133.
119 ibid., p. 135.
phrases are thus often subverted by the non-conventional overtones of suggested alternative meanings which she expresses through an ambivalent handling of the words’ sonorities themselves, thus “disturbing the march of semantic notation with what could be compared to unwritten musical overtones”. Relying on Kristevan aesthetics, Stewart will thus speak of “Woolf’s phonic counterpoint”, i.e. her syncopated collaboration between the written and the read [which] creates a poetic resonance that is at the same time a dissonance within the logic of inscription, of textuality itself. In vibrating upon the ear, this conceptual discord between the graphic and the phonic matter of words appears to reroute the written text through the palpable, the palpating upper body, its passively engaged organs of articulation.

For Phillips, the effect is very much the same as that of Wagner’s ambiguous chords – belonging neither to one key nor another but hovering on the edge of tonal dissolution in “an ambiguous or wandering tonality”. Whereas Stewarts’ purely linguistic analysis of Woolf’s language is particularly interesting in itself, Phillips’ Wagnerian interpretation of Woolf’s play on words is more difficult to condone.

Overall, Phillips’ analysis is too precise and too general at the same time to be completely convincing. Phillips selects only those aspects of *Parsifal* to which she can find an equivalent in the novel and there are many aspects of Wagner’s opera which are not taken into account.

- ... to Stravinsky’s *Firebird*

One of the most striking ways to highlight the shortcomings of these primarily thematic parallels between Woolf’s novel and Wagner’s operas is to show how they compare to studies which take the same starting points but end up in a very different musical realm. In her study of ‘Virginia Woolf and the Russian Dancers’, Evelyn Haller interprets *The Waves* in terms of Stravinsky’s *Firebird*. For Haller, out of all of

121 *ibid.*, p. 422.
Woolf’s novels, *The Waves* is “the novel most strongly influenced by Russian dance”.\textsuperscript{123} As with the case of Wagner, there is certainly evidence in Woolf’s diaries and letters that she had seen many performances of Stravinsky’s ballets, often danced by her friend Lydia Lopokova, as we have mentioned in our Chapter 1. As with the case of Wagner, the “mythic” aspect of the choreographies of Stravinsky’s music will be seen by Haller to form the basis for the mythic qualities of Woolf’s narrative, even though in her case, she highlights instead the ancient pagan rituals which were the subject-matter of many of Stravinsky’s works. In particular the “anti-heroic” characterization of Percival reminiscent of the clumsy, silent heroes of “Russian folklore”:

Percival’s death from a fall off his horse is an example of how he fits this pattern. Stravinsky observed that ‘Russian legends have as heroes characters that are simple, naive, sometimes even frankly stupid, devoid of all malice, and it is they who are always victorious over characters that are clever, artful, complex, cruel and powerful.’\textsuperscript{124}

In Jinny, Haller will see the firebird itself (see Figure 14 below for Bakst’s costume design for the firebird), basing her interpretation on the fact that Jinny wishes to have “a fiery dress, a yellow dress, a fulvous dress to wear in the evening” (*W*, 15) as well as the fact that she is constantly described in terms of dancing:

Look, when I move my head I ripple all down my narrow body; even my thin legs ripple like a stalk in the wind. I flicker between the set face of Susan and Rhoda’s vagueness; I leap like one of those flames that run between the cracks of the earth; I move, I dance; I never cease to move and to dance. I move like the leaf that moved in the hedge as a child and frightened me. I dance over these streaked, these impersonal, distempered walls with their yellow skirting as firelight dances over teapots. I catch fire even from women’s cold eyes. (*W*, 30)

\textsuperscript{123} Evelyn Haller, *op.cit.*, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{124} *ibid.*, p. 201.
A further thematic parallel is seen between Jinny’s refusal to commit herself to one person only and the firebird’s escape at the end of the ballet: “Thus Jinny is reborn each day, like a febrile bird breaking out of an egg with no disablements from the day before” to finally nearly “die from exhaustion from dancing like the chosen maiden in The Rite of Spring”\textsuperscript{126}. Again, as in the case of Gyllian Phillips’ study of borrowings from Parsifal, many aspects of the Firebird are overlooked. Though Haller will not speak of Stravinsky’s musical style, she will however endeavour to trace a choreographic influence on the way Woolf depicts her characters in group scenes. Jinny will always appear “at the center of the stage at the center of perspective” in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{125} The Yorck Project: 10,000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, Directmedia Publishing GmbH, 2002.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Evelyn Haller, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 201.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
same way as "the firebird is surrounded by golden apples and by the audience in an
elegant theatrical setting". Each character has "her or his solo in the foreground",

they all dance in essentially the same style, but each dancer has particular steps and
individuated attitudes and gestures. The stylistic sameness of the soliloquies can be
compared with Russian iconic style.

But again, the parallels are too general to be truly convincing.

That Haller is speaking here of the very aspects of Woolf’s novel which the
Wagnerian scholars take to be sure signs of Wagnerism reveals the limitations of such
intertextual approaches in which very often the actual musical elements play a
minimal role, if at all.

c. *The Waves* as a symphonic narrative

(i) The symphonic paradigm

... like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within
another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of
myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air. (‘Kew Gardens’, *SF*, 95)

The trouble with the musical readings of Woolf’s novel that we have analyzed
above is that they all contain the same flaw which tends to undermine their whole
analysis, from Levin’s assumption that music illustrates the “struggle of life”, to
Elicia Clements’ assumption that op. 130/133 is the work “behind” the novel, to
Schulze’s notion that Woolf had probably heard of Schoenberg’s techniques and to
Phillip’s reading of Wagnerian motifs into the text. None of these readings are
satisfactory because they assume that they are the only correct interpretations, and
very circumscribed interpretations they are too. Rather incredibly, they take the same

---

127 ibid.
quotations and see their own considerations within them. They are finally blind to the purely musical features of the text.

Despite the very explicit reference to the “symphony” in the text itself, no critic has ever investigated the importance of the genre in itself in the novel. When used, the term itself is rarely questioned by critics and is often used to describe the narrative in a most simplistic or superficial manner. Elicia Clements, for instance, will thus describe *The Waves*, as a “symphony [which is] as cacophony as it is harmonious”.\(^{129}\) She continues by saying that “Woolf’s musical concept enables diversity, and unpredictable, dissonant, yet somehow inclusive whole”.\(^{130}\) Clements’ use of the adverb “somehow” and her failure to pinpoint just how this “musical concept” functions within the novel, just shows how vague some analyses of Woolf’s musicality can be, “somehow” being defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as meaning: “in some manner or by some means not understood or defined”.\(^{131}\) Clements has obviously not tried to understand the role of the symphonic model in Woolf’s narrative. That the symphony should be specifically a model for diversity, unpredictability and dissonance, as Clements contends, is quite a debatable understanding of the genre and one which Clements does not further question. There is far more to the notion of “symphony” than it being a principle which “somehow” gives the effect of an “inclusive whole” and Clements didn’t need to look very far to work even that out considering Bernard himself describes the symphony as a work which gives “the effect of the whole” (W, 182).

Interestingly, a narrative based entirely on interjected soliloquies was not part of Woolf’s original conception but came into being in a systematic way half-way through her first draft, from page 217 onwards, during Episode 4, a farewell dinner which gathered all seven characters before Percival left for India. It is at this point too that the analogy of the symphony first appears in the text of the manuscript, no less than three times running, thus revealing the link between the musical features of the symphony and the style of the interjected soliloquies:

It is like the first bar of a symphony, said Jinny, tasting the


\(^{130}\) ibid.

\(^{131}\) *OED online.*
nauseous, but delightful wine. You have said that before; & you repeat it because that is the phrase out of which everything else is going to grow. (W, Draft I, page 218132)

But then tonight we are together, said Jinny. Rh Susan. The symphony then will be made of our-be what is different in us coming together, said Neville (W, Draft I, page 218)

But What is it that unites us? said Louis,

[...] We have all tried to accentuate the things that make us unlike each other. But it is a symphony. We are also alike. (W, Draft I, page 226)

These three references to “symphony” were subsequently omitted by the author in the final version of this scene as she struck at that point upon the device of the interjected soliloquies (which she then proceeded to apply to the whole text, going back over her drafts to rewrite the opening episodes of the novel in the same style), thus apparently literally setting about actually writing a literary “symphony” of voices. Bernard will again refer to the “symphony” in his summing up at the end of the novel and this passage is to become the only one, in the final version, which was to feature the term, despite the references which had punctuated the holograph drafts:

And then Our friends. Yes – it is they who become woven into recur; Neville, Louis Jinny Susan, Rhoda. Larpent Ronning Blake Hughes [...].

One’s friends are Their faces, their presences, their little gestures, their conversations one had – the sense that grew in those years of a marvellous instrument – sonority – a music – a whole symphony – a concord & discord – a power to make Neville sound; Rhoda sound; or Louis; or whoever it might be, as one rushed upstairs &

132 As we indicated in our Table of Abbreviations, we shall be referring here to Graham’s transcript and pagination of the two holograph drafts (Draft I and Draft II), op.cit.
said Let's talk – Let's get to the bottom – let's flinging ones hat on the sofa, said Let's get to the bottom of this matter. (W, Draft II, page 679)

The list of musical terms (a “marvellous instrument”, a “sonority”, a “music”, a “whole symphony”, a “concord and discord” or a “power” to make her characters “sound”) shows how Woolf was at that point casting about for a suitable metaphor for suggesting the effect she was after, i.e. the “power” to make her characters “sound” together in “concord & discord”, the effect being best expressed by the term “symphony” as it etymologically means to “sound together” (σω- together + φωνή- sound). In the final version of this passage, the “symphony” is however not understood to be merely a suggestive metaphor for expressing the sometimes parallel or intersecting lives of a multiplicity of characters but taken by Woolf to be a device by which she might actually achieve and express the simultaneous and unified effect of the whole herself. Her novel was thus to have the same aesthetic function in literary expression as the symphony does in musical expression:

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—again like music. What a symphony with its concord and its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. With Neville, “Let’s discuss Hamlet.” With Louis, science. With Jinny, love. (W, 182)

Though similar in some ways (cf. the same references to “concord” and “discord”, to the instruments of the orchestra, etc.), the two versions of this passage differ quite markedly and significantly. Whereas in the first version, Bernard had quite candidly compared the effect of his friendship with Susan, Jinny, Rhoda, Neville and Louis to a symphony, himself being a sort of conductor who could make them “sound” at his will – the term “symphony” remaining metaphorical and thematic at that point -, in the final version however, the analogy is extended and complicated by the fact that it is linked directly to language and literature as Bernard the novelist questions his own art. In the final version, the question turns towards the literary expression of that “symphony” of lives and voices, i.e. the relation between an effect perceived as being
intrinsically musical and the way to achieve this effect in language. This brings up our first important interdisciplinary point: there will always be a two-sided underlying metaphor in the novel in the fact that the interweaving of the lives of the characters is compared to a "symphony" and its consequence, that the otherwise "absolute" symphonic genre itself is interpreted programmatically in terms of lives, voices and philosophic topics. That the symphony may be an analogy for human interactions, we must, at this point, take for granted, because what interests us is the actual process of musicalization which, as we are arguing, is in itself far from being performed on a metaphorical level as Woolf redefines the scope of her symphonic model to include a reflection on the musicalization of fiction in the final version of this key passage. By tracing the origin of the symphonic model in the holograph drafts and Woolf's corresponding diaries, we shall determine in which way the notion of "symphonic" narrative does in fact go beyond the metaphorical to reflect an actual process of musicalization. As we have seen, none of the critics who have studied the musicality of *The Waves* have however taken any particular interest in the symphonic model *per se* even though they have touched upon certain characteristics however which belong foremost to the symphony.

A close analysis of all the contextual references to the musical features associated with the "symphony" reveal that Virginia Woolf did not only have in mind the general governing principles of the "symphonic" genre in general (i.e. works for orchestra or small orchestral ensembles, including the symphony, the symphonic poem, the overture and some chamber music, but also by extension, genres which have a polyphonic dimension such as the concerto and in the vocal domain, the opera), but more precisely, the forms and structures associated with the specific genre of the nineteenth century symphony, and this, in several regards: first of all, the explicit reference to orchestration, instrumentation and polyphony, secondly, the implicit reference to thematic transformation and orchestration, and finally, a reference to a particular type of musical form, the sonata-form, usually associated with the first movement of the symphony. We shall therefore be addressing these aspects point by point in our study.

(ii) Symphonic orchestration in *The Waves*
Regarding the first point, most critics agree that the musical source behind Woolf's musicalization of *The Waves* can be identified as being the (original) last movement of Beethoven's string quartet, op. 133, since we know that she was listening to this at the time she was writing the novel, and, as a consequence, many critics read the characteristics of Woolf's musicalization in relation to op. 133. Elicia Clements' analysis of one-to-one correspondences between the movements of Beethoven's quartet op. 130/133 and *The Waves* being an example in case. But how much chamber music involves fiddles, flutes, trumpets and drums? Certainly not Beethoven's string quartets. This point has been systematically overlooked in the criticism which suggests parallels between the string quartets and the novel's musical features. Whereas is it true that some characteristics of op. 130/133 may have contributed to Woolf's musicalization, the diary reference to Beethoven's quartets may also be particularly misleading as it fails to take into account the specifically symphonic features of the novel. It is far more pertinent to start from the musical references within the text itself and consider therefore the symphonic genre as Woolf's main musical model. The choice of these four instruments in *The Waves* is furthermore quite striking and particularly significant: each and every one of them is indeed representative of the four instrumental sections which traditionally make up an orchestra, i.e. strings, woodwind, brass and percussion, again pointing to the symphonic model.

By comparing the two versions of the passage in which Bernard refers to the symphony, it transpires that the original metaphor (the lives of the six characters compared to a symphony of lives) is superseded, in the second version, by the more important question as to how one can actually transfer the modalities of the symphony into a work of literature, thus raising the question as to whether literature can achieve the same "effect" as music. This "effect" is understood in *The Waves* as the expression of a cohesive "whole" of which the symphony becomes a paradigm. Even though the external structural features of the symphony are similar to that of the instrumental sonata,\(^{133}\) the differences between the symphony, in which the sheer number of instruments allows for a complex vertical texture of "voices", and the more

\(^{133}\) typically a work in four movements in which the internal structure for each movement is also typical of the sonata, i.e. a first movement built usually according to the principles of the sonata-form, followed by a slow second movement in sonata-form, ABA or theme and variations, a Scherzo, and finally, a lively finale, often composed in rondo-form.
Figure 15. Last page of Part I (bars 89 to 100) of the full score of Mahler's Eighth Symphony: on this page, cf. the 38 staves for 66 individual “parts” or “voices” (incl. 21 different instruments, 2x4 voice choir and 5 vocal soloists) - public domain edition downloaded from http://www.imslp.org
limited polyphonic range of the instrumental sonata or works for chamber ensembles
in which only a few voices can be played at once, are quite marked.\textsuperscript{134} What sets the
symphony apart from other genres is precisely the potentially illimited complexity of
its polyphonic range, making it the instrumental counterpart of the vocal chorus and
indeed Schulz described the genre in J.G. Sulzer's \textit{Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen
Künste} (1774), as a “choral work for instruments”.\textsuperscript{135} It is for that reason that the
instrumental range of the symphony grew during the nineteenth century beyond all
proportion – the textures of the earliest eighteenth century four-part symphonies for
strings only (two violins, viola and bass/double bass, with the optional continuo group
of harpsichord and bassoon or viole da gamba) being progressively expanded
throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{136} Mahler’s Eighth
Symphony in E-flat Major, for instance, composed in 1906/07, was controversially
nicknamed “Symphony of a Thousand” by its original producer, for the
unprecedented range and complexity

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure16.jpg}
\caption{Photo of the orchestra and choirs at the American première of Mahler’s 8th Symphony involving 1068 performers conducted by Leopold Stokowski in Philadelphia in 1916.}
\end{figure}

of its orchestration (see above, the same “effect” as music. This “effect” is understood
in \textit{The Waves} as the expression of a cohesive “whole” of which the symphony
becomes a paradigm. Even though the external structural features of the symphony
are similar to that of the instrumental sonata, the differences between the symphony,
in which the sheer number of instruments allows for a complex vertical texture of
“voices”, and the more

Figure 15, for an example of Mahler’s orchestral score), its premières in 1910
(Munich) and 1916 (Philadelphia), involving more than one thousand performers (see
Figure 16). Most importantly, as Mark Evan Bonds has remarked, from the nineteenth

\textsuperscript{134} cf. Mark Evan Bonds, ‘symphony’, §II.1, \textit{Grove Music Online}.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{136} Jan Larue/Eugene K. Wolf, ‘symphony’, §I.4, \textit{Grove Online}. 

286
century onwards, “the symphony was consistently valued for its unique ability to unite the widest possible range of instruments in such a way that no one voice predominates and all contribute to the whole”, in such a way, that the “individual voices” of each instrument “are ‘melted to become discrete single elements within the whole’, as one anonymous writer put it in 1820”.137 Unsurprisingly, what are in fact purely musical features have often given rise to programmatic interpretations of the symphonic genre. As Bonds argues,

however naive such interpretations may strike us today, they reveal a fundamental disposition towards hearing in a symphony the sentiments of a multitude as opposed to those of a mere individual.

Throughout the 19th century this relationship of individual voices to the orchestra as a whole was frequently compared to the relationship between the individual and the ideal society or state – that is, to an essentially democratic, egalitarian society in which no single figure predominates and in which individuals can fully realize their potential only as functioning members of a much larger society. 138

To put it succinctly, not only a mirror of an egalitarian view of a society in which every individual played an equal part, the symphony has been perceived by some composers and critics to also reflect the underlying cosmic relations of the whole universe:

Mahler’s much-quoted remark in the early 20th century that a symphony must be ‘like the world’ echoes a long tradition that viewed the symphony as the most cosmic of all instrumental genres.139

That the symphony may “represent” the relations between the individual and society or the forces at play within the world is without doubt controversial since it is making musical features “represent” non-musical elements to the point of turning this genre into a philosophical argument,140 but Virginia Woolf’s understanding of the scope and

137 Mark Evan Bonds, ‘symphony’, §II.1, Grove Music Online.
138 ibid.
139 ibid.
140 cf. in particular the Romantic interpretations of the relations between the soloist and the orchestra in the “concerto”, a genre which is perceived in the nineteenth century as an unequal and tragic battle of forces in which the soloist is often seen to personify an individual struggling against the coordinated
role of the symphonic model does not deviate from the dominating view at that time that the symphony was the genre in which “every voice is making its own particular contribution to the whole”.\textsuperscript{141} It is certainly tempting to read a programmatic understanding of the symphony into Woolf’s musicalization of the novel and this is what many scholars have attempted in their analysis of the musicality of *The Waves*.

(iii) Towards a new typology of musicalized fiction

In *The Waves*, the “symphony” of voices of the main narrative is mirrored by the “chorus” of birds in the interludes. That Woolf should have described her “chorus” of voices in terms of “symphony” (i.e. a work of pure instrumental music), while the notion of “chorus” (which usually implies the singing of words) is associated with a “symphony” of bird songs, singing their wordless “blank melody” (*W*, 6) during the interludes, is quite remarkable and cannot be put down to any inconsistency on the author’s part. By emphasizing the wordlessness of the bird chorus and by highlighting the abstract nature of her symphony of voices, Woolf suggests that her musicalization is not to be understood from a thematic or metaphorical angle but as an abstract design which would underpin the whole conception of the novel, based on the purely technical features of the symphony. It remains to be said indeed that even from a purely musical perspective, the technical features of the symphony can give rise to perfectly valid descriptions of the symphony as a genre in which all the instrumental voices play an equal part and contribute to the

\footnotesize

forces of the orchestra, themselves perceived as representing fate, society, etc. (Leon Botstein, *concerto*, §4, *Grove Music Online*). There are many examples of rhetorical arguments between soloist and orchestra, but the critical reception of the second movement from Beethoven’s 4th piano concerto op. 58 is probably the most striking of all and could be described as an alternance between fortissimo unison orchestral passages and contrasting pianissimo choral passages played by the soloist whose character appears to influence the orchestral passages which gradually become softer and less aggressive as the soloist progressively takes over, the piece ending quietly. This movement is unsurprisingly systematically perceived as “programme” music: “in the Fourth Piano Concerto he engaged the performing force in an overt conversation, harnessing orchestration to evoke voice, gender and the suggestion of some unknown narrative.” (Kern Holoman, *Instrumentation and Orchestration*, §4, *Grove Music Online, op.cit.*). These characteristics have themselves given rise to a recurrent association of the work with the Orpheus legend (cf. Owen Jander’s article in which he argues for such a programmatic reading of this movement, *Beethoven’s “Orpheus in Hades”: The “Andante con moto” of the Fourth Piano Concerto*, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Spring 1985, pp. 195-212; see also his revisions to this article in ‘Orpheus Revisited: A Ten-Year Retrospect on the Andante con moto of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto’, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 31-49)\textsuperscript{141} Schulz quoted in Mark Evan Bonds, ‘symphony’, §II.1, *Grove Music Online*.
effect of the whole without leading us astray into considering controversial and misleading programmatic interpretations. This, however, raises a certain number of methodological questions which a short overview of the standard benchmark melopoetic typology (outlined most comprehensively by Werner Wolf in his recent study of the musicalization of fiction) will help clarify. By situating our analysis of the musicality of *The Waves* within the context of current melopoetic research, we shall furthermore highlight certain problems which Wolf’s typology fails to address.

Before we go any further in our analysis of the musicalization of *The Waves*, we need to ask ourselves whether the language of literature can be treated in the same way as the musical material of the symphony. We are indeed dealing here not with an association of two very different artistic and expressive media as happens in the operatic genre (which associates music and words) for instance, nor with a thematic handling of music as was mostly the case in our first part with Woolf’s questioning of the musical experience, in her short story, ‘The String Quartet’, but with the actual combination of these two media at a structural and stylistic level. If Woolf is composing a literary symphony by substituting literary elements to musical ones, at what point does the literature become music and the symphony become literature, and at what point does the literary symphony cease to be musical to become a purely literary novel? Underpinning all this is the fundamental question: what is musical about music and when does music cease to be music (or, for that matter, literature cease to be literature)? These difficult questions are central to the whole hazy area of the “musicalization of fiction” and we shall try to provide some background templates in order to address some of them in this chapter before proceeding to our actual study of *The Waves*.

One of the most influential scholars working in the field of interdisciplinarity today is Werner Wolf, founding member of the ‘International Association for Word and Music Studies’ in 1997. Wolf has taken up and expanded Steven Paul Scher’s 1960s groundbreaking interdisciplinary studies which had been initiated at a time when research into interdisciplinarity went very much against the grain of the then traditional “uni-disciplinarian” academic divisions. Wolf has attempted to draw the most comprehensive, systematic and detailed schema of the broad and often confused field of interdisciplinary studies, focusing in particular on the relations between music and literature from the literary angle. As a starting point, his delineations are of great interest to us as he describes the features of the various types of musicalized fiction.
In order to narrow down the sense of the word “intermediality”, Wolf starts by outlining the difference between intermediality proper and intertextuality in general (see Figure 17 below). It is true that within the specific frame of recent literary postmodernist criticism, the Kristevan “intertextual” analysis of literature has overshadowed the specific modalities of melopoetics as intermediality has been seen to be but a “subdivision of intertextuality”. Intermediality, in the narrow sense of the word, occurs, according to Wolf, only if two distinct media are involved. As Wolf however points out, there are some notable differences between the relations between literary texts and those of music and literature, in particular the concomitant presence in the latter case of two different semiotic forms of expression, i.e. two “media”. Whereas the allusion to musical works, genres or forms in literary texts can be seen to belong to an intertextual web of cultural interrelations (thus termed by Wolf as “quasi-intertextual”), the actual expressive semiotic modalities of music and literature are so different that a study of musicalized fiction necessitates a different approach than that of intertextuality.

144 ibid., p. 46-47.
Figure 17. Werner Wolf's diagram of "intersemiotic forms"\textsuperscript{145}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure17.png}
\caption{Werner Wolf's diagram of "intersemiotic forms"}
\end{figure}

\textbf{INTERSEMIOTIC FORMS}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{INTERTEXTUALITY} (verbal intersemiotic relations)
\item relations between a text (of a specific genre) and a specific (pre-)text a specific other genre
\item \textbf{INTERMEDIALLY} (cross-media intersemiotic relations)
\item relations between a medium or medial component of a work and a specific work created in another medium a specific genre of another medium a specific genre another medium or medial component in general
\item \textbf{quasi-intertextual intermediality}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{145} ibid., p. 47.
Wolf further splits intermediality into two branches – that of “overt” or “direct” intermediality in which both media are contiguously present (such as opera and song, for instance) and that of “covert” or “indirect” intermediality in which “the signifiers of one medium only are apparent” (cf. Figure 19), the dominant medium either thematizing (i.e. music brought up as a “theme” in a novel) or imitating (i.e. a literary text built according to musical principles). In the relations between a literary text and a musical composition (literature into music), whereas the “imitating” of a text in music from a structural point of view might be relatively easy to achieve (cf. most “programme music”: cf. Ravel’s Gaspard de la Nuit based on poems by Aloysius Bertrand, Dukas’ Sorcerer’s Apprentice or Berlioz’s Symphonie Fantastique), the thematic aspect is far more complex to determine since absolute music can only “thematize” a concept indirectly. To give an example, in the solo piano piece ‘Pensées des Morts’ (in Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses), Franz Liszt will thus insert a choral version of Psalm 129 (‘De Profundis’), writing the words of the psalm into the piano part (this indication is more directed at the performer than at the audience who cannot read/hear these words) in order to refer thematically to Purgatory (see Figure 18):
Whilst it is thus relatively easy, albeit uncommon, to reference texts within the actual musical score (more often is the case of a text given before or after the score, i.e. ‘Ondine’, ‘Le Gibet’ and ‘Scarbo’ from Ravel’s Gaspard de la Nuit are associated with the corresponding poems by Aloysius Bertrand, printed in a preface to the scores themselves whereas the titles to Debussy’s preludes follow the music), in a literary context however, it is very rare that a musical score is embedded into a text. This raises not only the question as to the effect of such an embedded musical score, not being the same as that of a performance of that score, but also as to whether the readers can read musical notation or not. The author thus very often has to rely instead on either thematic references to music or verbal or ekphrastic descriptions of musical performances (cf. our analysis of Woolf’s ‘The String Quartet’). In both cases, however, Wolf implies that the semiotic modalities of the dominant medium takes over those of the non-dominant medium. That is however particularly problematical since there is a very thin line between the modalities of musical expression and those of literature in the context of a structural/formal or aesthetic type of musicalization in

146 public domain edition from www.sheetmusicarchive.net.
which the very semiotic identity of the literary medium is itself subverted by the influence of the musical idiom.

Figure 19. Wolf, diagram of "basic forms of intermediality" 147

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERMEDIALLY</th>
<th>basic forms of the involvement of two media in a work or text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>overt/direct intermediality</td>
<td>intermediality without medial transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covert/indirect intermediality</td>
<td>intermediality with medial transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(the signifiers of two media are apparent and distinct; overt intermediality may be total or partial; primary or secondary)</td>
<td>(the signifiers of only one medium are apparent; covert intermediality may be total or partial; is always primary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without medial dominant</td>
<td>with medial dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m1 and m2</td>
<td>m1 and M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m2 and M1*</td>
<td>m1 in(to) M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m2 in(to) M1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degrees of intermedial influence in overt intermediality</td>
<td>main forms of covert intermediality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contiguity (\rightarrow) adaptation</td>
<td>'telling' (\rightarrow) 'showing'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thematization imitation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wolfs outlines are satisfactory inasmuch as they highlight in particular the "covert" aspect of some interdisciplinary literary experiments, but Wolfs more detailed breakdown of the covert forms of intermediality will raise a certain number of problematical issues. Wolf divides musicalization into two distinct areas, from the most explicit (bottom left-hand side of the diagram) to the most implicit (bottom right-hand side of the diagram):

1. the “thematization” of music on the one hand, i.e. any explicit references to music in relation to a text, be it
   a) intratextual (metatextual or not)
   b) paratextual (titles, prefaces, etc.)
   c) or contextual (author’s intentionality, letters, diaries, etc.)

2. the “imitation” of music on the other hand:
   a) formal and structural analogies
   b) “word music” (emphasis put on the acoustic properties of words)
   c) and “imaginary content analogies”, i.e. non-technical imaginative descriptions of musical works.

This last category overlaps both the technical aspect of formal musicalization as well as the referential aspect, i.e. explicit reference to music. Even though Wolf’s typology is a good starting point, it however only serves to describe the most superficial aspects of the musicalization of fiction and fails to bring into play the very essence of the process of musicalization. Whereas the analysis of the role of explicit references to music within literary texts can be quite straightforward, the technical aspect of borrowings from music into literature are far more problematical to assess and we only wish Wolf had further subdivided this particularly complex and controversial category. Diagrams, useful as they are to clearly bring into play all the various aspects and flux of influence, can also be misleading. Wolf, in this diagram for instance, strangely divides the “formal and structural analogies (micro and macroforms)” from the “referential forms” or “thematization of music” even though he argues in his chapter “how to recognize a musicalized fiction when reading one” that it is indispensable to identify the musicalization of musicalized fiction148

148 *ibid.*, p. 71.
Figure 20. Wolf’s re-interpretation of Scher’s typology of the “main areas of musico-literary studies”149

A) ‘MAIN AREAS OF MUSICO-LITERARY STUDIES’
according to Scher, ed. 1984:14 (translation mine)

- music
  - musicology
  - musico-literary studies
- literature
  - literary studies
  - Literaturwissenschaft

- music in literature
  - music and literature
  - music in literature

- programme music
  - vocal music
  - word music
  - formal and verbal music
  - parallels to music

B) MUSICO-LITERARY INTERMEDIALLY
basic forms

- overt/direct intermediality
  - use of musical and verbal signifiers
  - music and literature

- covert/indirect intermediality
  - use of verbal or musical signifiers only; the other (non-dominant) medium present in the first (dominant) medium as signified (and referent)
  - literature in music
  - music in literature

(e.g. vocal music)

(e.g. programme music)

main forms of covert musical presence in literature

thematization (‘telling’)

- evocation of vocal music through associative quotation

imitation (‘showing’)

(core area of) MUSICALIZATION OF FICTION/LITERATURE.

position/occurrence: always textual

position/occurrence: always textual

positional forms

referential forms

technical forms

- textual
  - para- (contextual)
  - textual (contextual)

- general reference to music

- specific reference to a musical genre or composition (including ‘verbal music’)

- imaginary
  - content analogies
  - structural analogies

- ‘formal and ‘word music’

149 ibid., p. 70.
To ensure the reading of a text with reference to the ‘alien’ frame of music, a strong marker must be used.\textsuperscript{150}

As such, Wolf further summarizes the types of evidence which are necessary to recognize musicalized fiction:

Figure 21. Wolf, ‘Types of Potential Evidence for the Musicalization of Fiction’\textsuperscript{151}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF POTENTIAL EVIDENCE FOR THE MUSICALIZATION OF FICTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POTENTIAL EVIDENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circumstantial/contextual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overtly inter-medial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixture of music/symptoms of an imitation of music:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) acoustic fore-grounding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| b) unusual patterns and recurrences, self-referential-
| c) departure from narrative plausibility and referential/     |
|                                                |
| textual                                                      |
|                                                              |
| symptoms of an imitation of music:                            |
| deviations from traditional or typical storytelling due to    |
| a) acoustic fore-grounding                                     |
| b) unusual patterns and recurrences, self-referential-
| c) departure from narrative plausibility and referential/     |
|                                                |
| cultural and biographical evidence                            |
| parallel works of the same author with musicalization of fiction |
| authorial thematizations of musicalization referring to the text in question |

In fact, the very expression “music into literature” is questionable as it polarizes music and literature and fails to take into account the specific features of “musicalized fiction”. It seems to us indeed that the common ground between music and literature within musicalized fiction is based on shared concepts which belong neither to music

\textsuperscript{150} ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{151} ibid., p. 83.
proper nor to literature proper but only to musicalized fiction. Wolf does not take into account why writers seek to write literary “symphonies” in the first place. Why do these authors need to rely on musical models if the overarching principles and the finality of their musical models are not musical as such? How often does the question of “simultaneity” crop up in debates surrounding musicalized fiction? But simultaneity *tout court* is not musical. If the symphony is a model for the expression of an organic whole in which the parts are all interconnected, why do not authors simply endeavour to achieve an organic whole without relying on the problematical borrowings from the symphonic model? As a metaphor, the symphonic model is undoubtedly suggestive but remains metaphorical. As a literal device for the “composition” of musical novels, it seems doomed to

**Figure 22. Preliminary typology of musicalized fiction**
failure as one-to-one correspondences remain unsatisfactory. Simultaneity, without which polyphonic music would not exist, is at first view quite impossible in discursive language. Unless we analyse Woolf’s musicalization from within, we shall continue to draw imperfect analogies between music and literature by applying typical and simplistic musical forms from without onto the texts. Only from within the musicalized fiction will the specific technical features of Woolf’s musicalization truly make sense, serving to redefine both the expressive modalities which she perceived in the symphony, and those of Modernist prose. We therefore propose (see Figure 22), an alternative model for the overarching modalities of musicalized fiction in which the common principles of the work of art’s aesthetic function are central rather than musical principles or literary principles which will always clash. It is these common principles derived from both music and literature and determined by the overarching aesthetic function of the musicalized novel itself which define the technical modalities of musicalized fiction, not the individual technical and expressive parameters of either music or literature. It is why the authors are writing, i.e. the aesthetic function of their works within the wider landscape of artistic expression, which determines the stylistic expressive modalities of the hybrid genre of musicalized fiction.

(iv) A polyphonic narrative: from a *mise en abyme* of voices in *Mrs Dalloway* to the narratorial voice(s) of *The Waves*

Paradoxically it seems, one of the first objections to the notion of “literary symphony” brought up unwaveringly by melopoetic detractors, is that no simultaneous “audition” of voices can ever be heard/read in a novel, but that is precisely why novelists turn to the symphonic model in the first place. As Gerald Levin has said, “voices in the novel cannot be heard simultaneously, though images and phrases can pass from one monologue to another. To quote Arnold Schoenberg, ‘the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception’”.\(^{152}\) For this reason, Levin will reject the polyphonic aspect of the musical model, turning instead to the idea that music was, for Woolf, a purely ideological model as it embodies the

\(^{152}\) Gerald Levin, *op.cit.*, p. 128.
notions of “struggle” and “resolution”. If the musicalization of The Waves had simply been a matter of comparing her characters to the musical instruments of the orchestra and their personalities to musical themes, making them “sound” in the quickest alternance possible so as to suggest that the soliloquies are in fact simultaneous, this can hardly be considered as a successful attempt at literally achieving a musical “symphony”. They are not simultaneous and this would furthermore have only served to reveal the shortcomings of musicalization: what the novel in fact had failed to achieve, i.e. to transcend through a musicalization of fiction an unsatisfactory fragmented, unidimensional, linear and chronological narrative to express unity, complexity, simultaneity and “harmony”. This, as we shall see below, is the conclusion drawn by Mark Hussey as he describes The Waves as an “aesthetic failure”. Making Rhoda “sound”, Neville “sound”, Louis “sound” is easy enough but this is not polyphony as such, as Bernard himself implies when he says “how impossible” it is to give the “effect of the whole - again like music”. In that case, The Waves can only remain suggestive of polyphony. Truly enough, there is no denying that polyphony is also suggested in this way in the novel, on a metaphorical level, but what interests us at this point is to investigate how Woolf did in fact find a solution to make her characters “sound” simultaneously.

Even though it is true that at first view, the “symphonic” aspect of the novel’s six voices can only remain a suggestive metaphor unless they can somehow be made to be heard simultaneously, as they would be in a musical symphony. It is indeed a lure to believe the simultaneity is in the “voicing” of the novel’s characters simply because polyphony refers to simultaneous “voices” and the novel is composed from six voices. Such a conclusion is drawn far too hastily. The idea that a narrative only possesses one narrative “voice” at a time, in particular in The Waves, is a particularly simplistic way of understanding the modalities of the multiple narrative dimension of this Modernist text, and reflects a position quite untenable within modern narrative studies. Whereas it is true that none of the soliloquies can be read “simultaneously”, which would apparently undermine the notion that Woolf attempted to write a literary symphony other than in a metaphorical way, I would argue that Woolf does achieve the simultaneity she was seeking, not, as is usually thought, in the idea of alternating

153 ibid.
154 Mark Hussey, op.cit., p. 82.
the soliloquies, but in her play with the ambivalent and multiple layering of narrative voice(s) (in which however the modus operandi of the soliloquies plays a fundamental role). In fact, Virginia Woolf herself had affirmed that the soliloquies were to be read “consecutively” (D3: 312) and therefore not simultaneously. Gerald Levin suggests that in this particular diary entry, Woolf was in fact hoping that the soliloquies would be read in a musically “simultaneous” way, but I would argue the point. Her use of the word “consecutively” rather than “simultaneously” clearly indicates that she had in mind an idea of “succession” and not of simultaneity proper and it seems rather that Woolf was wondering at that point whether the transition from soliloquy to soliloquy was easy to follow, i.e. whether their style was, as she puts it, “homogeneous” enough, that is, written throughout in a uniform tone. “Rhythm” was the stylistic device which was to play a crucial role in helping her achieve the far less musical effect of “homogeneity”, which gives us the key to understanding how Woolf paradoxically achieved a musical simultaneity of voices.

The importance of Woolf’s attention to rhythm is not to be underestimated. In the case of The Waves in particular, Woolf noted in her diary, on the 20th of August 1930, that

\[\text{The Waves is I think resolving itself (I am at page 100) into a series of dramatic soliloquies. the thing is to keep them running homogeneously in & out, in the rhythm of the waves. (D3: 312)}\]

Eight days later, she made the same observation to a musician, her friend Ethel Smyth:

\[\text{I think then that my difficulty is that I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot. Does this convey anything? And thus though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader. This is rough and ready; but not wilfully inaccurate. (L4: 204, 28 August 1930).}\]

On the 2nd of September, she noted again in her diary:

155 Gerald Levin, op.cit., p. 218.
I say I am writing The Waves to a rhythm not to a plot. (D3: 316)

At that time (August/September 1930), Virginia Woolf was in the midst of working on her second draft of the novel and had reached Episode 4 in which, as we have seen, the notion of “symphony” had played such an important role in the first draft. Woolf’s understanding of rhythm is difficult to approach because she very often describes “rhythm” either through metaphors and analogies or through negatives: the “rhythm” of the soliloquies is thus compared to the rhythm of the “waves” (one soliloquy following another as waves on a beach), visually, as a weaving of strands (cf. the image of “running in and out”), or more technically, as an achronological and a-causal alternative to the traditional notions of “plot” and “narrative”. Woolf will indeed describe how in her novel, the “rhythmic design” should override the “facts”:

It should be kept simple & large.. the
rhythmic design should dominate the facts. Only one or two scenes.

(W, Notebook 8, page 755)

As for the characters,

they should say things to correspond with the wave: & the [pattern?] (W, notes for Episode 5, Notebook 6, page 753).

Virginia Woolf will thus rely on rhythm not only as a formal or stylistic device which would enable her to depart from the traditional notion of story-line which she perceived as an artificial arrangement of a linear sequence of fictional events which fail to represent the complexity and fluidity of being (cf. the references to past events, flashbacks, etc.) but also and primarily as a novel way to create a consistent narrative style, thus also overriding the traditional clear-cut characterization:

Suppose I could run all the scenes together more? – by rhythm, chiefly. So as to avoid those cuts; so as to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end – I dont want the waste that the breaks give; I want to avoid chapters; that indeed is my achievement, if any here: a saturated, unchopped, completeness; changes of scene, of mood, of person, done without spilling a drop. Now if it cd. be worked over with heat & currency thats all it wants. (D3: 343, 30 December 1930)
In a similar manner, in the novel itself, Bernard will metanarratively speak of the way the role of “rhythm”, in his ideal literary language, is to enable the author to write consistently and fluently and bridge the transitions from sentence to sentence, mood to mood, person to person and scene to scene “without spilling a drop” (cf. above, D3: 343), i.e. without any noticeable breaks in the style of writing:

It is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the lava flow of sentence into sentence that I need. 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. Let me read a page. No; this is dull; this is scrappy. This is rather too formal. Now I am getting the hang of it. Now I am getting his beat into my brain (the rhythm is the main thing in writing). Now, without pausing I will begin, on the very lilt of the stroke—.

‘Yet it falls flat. It peters out. I cannot get up steam enough to carry me over the transition. (W, 57)

By going beyond the theatrical features implied in the notion of “play-poem” to privilege the “rhythmic” nature of the speeches, Woolf’s thoughts were undeniably drawing upon a musical model of unity, consistency and fluidity.

In fact, an alternance of soliloquies is hardly original within the context of stream of consciousness literature. Woolf had already experimented with this quite extensively in *Mrs. Dalloway*, passing with ease from the mind of one character to another, as the following passage illustrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rezia</th>
<th>Septimus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For he was gone, she thought—gone, as he threatened, to kill himself—to throw himself under a cart! But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (<em>Mrs D</em>, 28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The example of *Mrs Dalloway* is interesting as it prefigures certain narrative procedures Woolf will develop in *The Waves*. In this novel, we have an example of a (quasi omniscient) narrator, who takes up residence at intervals in the individual minds of each character but who does not entirely merge into the character's mind, as one would expect from a “stream of consciousness” point of view, and presents us instead with what we shall argue is a symphonic piece of narration.

As we shall see, polyphony in *Mrs Dalloway* is not a metaphorical illusion given by a quick succession of different points of view. Due to the discursive linear logic of the language of prose, no voices can ever be uttered simultaneously, just as no events can be given to us at the same time but one after another (even though they may occur in the scene at the same time). The polyphony is achieved rather from the simultaneity of the different levels of voicing at one given moment, i.e. the voice of the narrator superimposed on that of character A, with that of perhaps another character B, whom character A is quoting. The characters very rarely speak their thoughts aloud, and it is the narrator’s voice who is giving them to us. Interestingly, as we shall see below in *The Waves*, the tone of the whole novel is the same throughout, as if one single voice is speaking from beginning to end and not the individually coloured voices of Clarissa, Septimus, Rezia, Hugh, etc. The unity of tone of *Mrs Dalloway* is not a fault in Woolf's style, as some have tried to point out (some critics have called it monotonous), but a contrived effect. The repetitions which pass from one character to another - this is true also for *The Waves*, as we shall see below, are words and events chosen by the narrator to create a multidimensional reading of the text, contributing to blur the traditional clear-cut outlines of the characters. More than a weaving in and out of minds, Virginia Woolf creates in this novel, a world in which many voices speak simultaneously, in a structure similar to that of Russian dolls. Each thought, each sentence could in effect be uttered by several different voices, literally superimposed, in a polyphony of voices which creates a certain quality or colour of harmony: these voices are sometimes concordant, sometimes discordant as the case may be: Clarissa’s words, “remember my party”, as they reverberate through Hugh’s mind as he walks away from her flat, are in discord with his own thoughts on the matter. The potential voices are:

1) Voice of Omniscient Narrator

2) Voice of primary character (thoughts of character, direct speech, etc.)
3) Voice of primary character imagining/re-enacting a secondary character's movements, and, like an infinite mirror, or a *mise en abyme* of voices, this secondary voice could itself be re-enacting a third character's voice, *ad infinitum*...

These voices become totally merged and superimposed in the text, so that one is never certain what voice is actually speaking, as it is being coloured by the other voices at the same time, as a musical "voice" is constantly being "coloured" by the other counterpointed voices, creating a blend of tones. In the following extract, Peter Walsh is thinking about Clarissa, after having met her again after five year's absence.

And of course she enjoyed life immensely. It was her nature to enjoy (though, goodness only knows, she had her reserves; it was a mere sketch, he often felt, that even he, after all these years, could make of Clarissa). Anyhow there was no bitterness in her; none of that sense of moral virtue, which is so repulsive in good women. She enjoyed practically everything. If you walked with her in Hyde Park, now it was a bed of tulips, now a child in a perambulator, now some absurd little drama she made up on the spur of the moment. (Very likely she would have talked to those lovers, if she had thought them unhappy.) She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people, to bring it out, with the inevitable result that she frittered her time away, lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination. *(Mrs D, 87)*

But here, it is Clarissa's voice that we are hearing beneath Peter's, as well as his, so that we are led here to see superimposed on Peter's walk in Regent's Park, the movements of Clarissa as well: she starts to accompany him through the park, he imagines that he is talking to her, what she would notice (the tulips, the child in the perambulator, the two lovers) and what she would do (speak to Septimus and Rezia), until slowly the scene transforms and transposes itself into a different place (a dinner party) at a different time (five years back). But Clarissa's presence in this scene is just as "real" as Peter's presence. The simultaneity of both voices and both actions is thus achieved.

Whereas the polyphonic nature of the narrative of *Mrs Dalloway* is never referred to either metanarratively or in external sources by Virginia Woolf as being
musical and could be an example of what Roland Barthes considers the intrinsic “musicality” of narrative discourse in literature,156 in *The Waves*, on the other hand, Virginia Woolf’s attempt at tackling simultaneity and polyphony, is a deliberate and explicit instance of the musicalization of fiction, and is for that reason, of a far more complex and subtle character, as we shall now try to show. What is original about Woolf’s handling of the stream of consciousness in *The Waves* is the discrepancy between the shared uniform tone in which all the soliloquies are written and the fact that each character is personally made to “say” his or her thoughts framed by quotation marks, rather than being made to “think” them indirectly - something which Woolf had actually sketched out on page 56 of the first draft before changing her narrative strategy in her draft of episode 4:

And Roger thought;  
and Susan thought; *We-are*  
And Rhoda thought; *we-are* (*W*, Draft I, page 56) -

If a narrator had been reporting to us the thoughts of the characters, a uniform tone (that of the narrator) would have been quite unremarkable. The problem is that, despite the fact that each character speaks individually in the first person, they all speak/think in the same tone of voice, with the same speech patterns, even though Louis, for instance, is Australian, and probably speaks differently, as he himself will point out: “‘I will not conjugate the verb,’ said Louis, ‘until Bernard has said it. My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent. I will wait and copy Bernard. He is English.” (*W*,14). The use in the text of all the hallmarks of direct speech to report the thoughts of the characters was to prove far more versatile since not all of the phrases are spoken aloud - often, the characters are merely thinking and not speaking as such. In the scenes of the novel which group the characters, the ambiguity between thought and dialogue is particularly striking. To take an example,

---

156 cf. in particular, Roland Barthes’ understanding of narrative progression in terms of counterpoint which is very similar in theory to the fugal outline we give ourselves of *Mrs Dalloway* in our Chapter 6 in particular: “The reader [...] perceives a linear sequence of terms. But what calls for special attention is that some terms belonging to several sequences can easily dovetail into each other. Before a sequence is completed, the initial term of a fresh sequence can be introduced: sequences proceed according to a contrapuntal pattern. Functionally the structure of narrative is that of the fugue: the narrative “puts in” new material even as it “holds on” to previous material.” ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter 1975, p. 255.
if we try to map the following passage, we can see how impossible it is to clearly determine the boundaries between the spoken and the thought phrases:

| spoken? | "All is to come [said Neville]." |
| spoken/thought? | "For you," said Bernard, "but yesterday I walked bang into a pillar-box. Yesterday I became engaged." |
| thought? | "How strange," said Susan, "the little heaps of sugar look by the side of our plates. Also the mottled peelings of pears, and the plush rims to the looking-glasses. I had not seen them before. Everything is now set; everything is fixed. Bernard is engaged. Something irrevocable has happened. A circle has been cast on the waters; a chain is imposed. We shall never flow freely again." |
| spoken/thought? | "For one moment only," said Louis, "Before the chain breaks, before disorder returns, see us fixed, see us displayed, see us held in a vice."
| thought? | "But now the circle breaks. Now the current flows. Now we rush faster than before. Now passions that lay in wait down there in the dark weeds which grow at the bottom rise and pound us with their waves. Pain and jealousy, envy and desire, and something deeper than they are, stronger than love and more subterranean. The voice of action speaks. Listen, Rhoda (for we are conspirators, with our hands on the cold urn), to the casual, quick, exciting voice of action, of hounds running on the scent. (W, 101-102)"

| Spoken (to Rhoda)? | action speaks. Listen, Rhoda (for we are conspirators, with our hands on the cold urn), to the casual, quick, exciting voice of action, of hounds running on the scent. |

If anything, in a novel written entirely in “dialogue” form, there is paradoxically no “dialogue” to speak of but only the silent thoughts which run alongside the words of a dialogue which we are not given. It seems that in *The Waves*, none of the phrases are actually spoken aloud, even though they do reflect indirectly the (unheard) spoken dialogue which must be going on during the dinner. In the farewell dinner scene we thus learn about what each character is thinking but we never know what they actually talked about. In such a way, despite its very “aural” nature – witness the numerous attempts which have been made to transform *The Waves* into a play\(^{157}\) –, the novel is silent and we are reminded in Woolf’s conception of *The Waves*, of Terence Hewet’s

\(^{157}\) see Appendix 9 for my review of a theatrical performance of *The Waves* given at the National Theatre in London on the 9\(^{th}\) of December 2006, produced and directed by Katie Mitchell. *The Waves* was also performed at the Université de Provence in an adaptation by Sylvie Boutley (April 2003).
plans for writing “a novel about Silence, [...] the things people don’t say” (VO, 218). As a consequence, Woolf’s choice of the verb “to say” has nothing to do with a conception of spoken soliloquies, as is usually thought, but with the process of verbalization, another matter altogether. Melba Cuddy-Keane will describe Woolf as a “novelist of voices” in her analysis of the aurality of The Waves, maintaining that the aural nature of the soliloquies cannot be disputed: “from her first thoughts about it, The Waves was in her mind as something heard”. Her main argument lies in the fact that she thinks that Woolf, in a diary entry, “claimed the idea for a wireless adaptation”, thus “suggest[ing] how much the novel was to her an aural work” – but on closer scrutiny of the diary entry in question, I would question Cuddy-Keane’s reading of Woolf’s phrase: “Wogan said The Waves shd. be filmed: I in my vague way, said V. Isham wants to do it – but she meant to broadcast, & oddly enough, when I came home I found a letter from her saying so” (DA: 140). Woolf was not here claiming the idea that The Waves should be transformed into a play but simply noting down that she had been mistaken in telling Wogan Phillipps that Virginia Isham had also wanted to film the novel when in fact Isham wanted to transform it into a radio-play. On the contrary, a performance of The Waves seemed to Woolf particularly problematical as she wrote in a letter to Isham that “I am rather in the dark as to what you think could be done” (L5: 149). Even though Woolf was flattered that both Isham and Phillips wanted to dramatize her novel, she remained particularly doubtful as to the final effect and was particularly unconvinced about the success of any performance – be it broadcast on radio or filmed, writing to Isham that “I suppose a film [of The Waves] would be all dumbshow” (L5: 150). Neither Isham’s nor Phillips’s projects ever saw the light. If six actors were to read or play the six characters, I would argue that this would actually impoverish the expressive modalities of the text, infringing upon the very nature of the narrative discourse.

Even more versatile are the passages which focus on individual characters in which the full extent of Woolf’s narrative strategy is even more striking. In the original draft, Louis will “think” he is a plant:

---

158 Melba Cuddy-Keane, op. cit. p. 87.
159 ibid., p. 88.
160 ibid., p. 87.
161 ibid., p. 88.
He stood there, pressing the hollow tube of a stalk & making the sticky drops ooze out. So that the sticky drops oozed. He stood there in the middle of the path, & thought fantastically, how he was rooted there, but with roots that went down to the middle of the earth (W, Draft I, page 73 – my italics)

In the final version, he is made to “say” these thoughts, which remain thoughts however much they are “said”:

Now they have all gone,” said Louis. “I am alone. [...] I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth, through veins of lead and silver. (W, 8)

The effect is quite different in the latter case, more direct and vivid (cf. the use of first person narration, rather than an indirect and more ponderous third person narrative) as the phrases become direct statements, but also more linguistically self-conscious as the language itself becomes the focus of attention. Indeed, in contrast to the verbs “to speak” or “to think”, the verb “to say” has indeed for object the words or phrases which are being said. Grammatically, one can use the verbs “speak” or “think” without any object but one cannot “say” anything without following this verb with the words one is saying. Furthermore, the verb “to say” contains both the notions of aural speech and thought speech. According to the Oxford English Dictionary:

as the word [say] designates not the action of speaking itself, but its relation to the object [i.e. “a particular word or series of words, or a sentence representing the meaning of a particular series of words”], its use with reference to written expression does not ordinarily, like the similar use of speak, involve any consciousness of metaphor.

Whereas the verb “to speak” designates the aurality of a given speech-act, and “to think” indicates thought itself (be it verbalized thought or non-verbal thought), “to say” centres on the contrary on the speech-act itself, be it spoken aloud or silently (but

---

162 to give an example: one can say: “he sat on a bench, spoke/thought, got up and walked away” but one cannot say “he sat on a bench, said, got up and walked away”.

163 OED online.
verbally) thought. In all cases, the verb “to say” necessarily implies verbalization. A non-verbal thought cannot be “said” — it can only be “thought”. When Louis is made to “think” that he is a plant with roots going down to the middle of the earth, these thoughts are not necessarily verbalized by him but they can be verbalized for us by the narrator who is telling us about what he is thinking. But when Louis “says” that he is rooted, etc., these thoughts are necessarily verbalized by him.

A certain number of questions immediately spring to mind which reveal the complexity of the narrative voice in this text: Who is narrating? Who is reporting the characters thoughts and to what extent does the overall narratorial voice influence what is being reported to us? Who is saying “said Bernard”, “said Susan”, etc.? Are all the phrases spoken by the characters actually verbalized by them as well? Could the overall narrator be verbalizing some of the character’s thoughts? Whom are the phrases addressed to and who is addressing them? Within the soliloquies themselves, who are the characters addressing the phrases to? To themselves, to each other? The word “soliloquy”, used by Woolf in her diary as well as in the novel itself to describe the interjected style of the novel’s discourse, would seem to imply that the characters are speaking to themselves, as Bernard will do quite self-consciously throughout the novel (“I addressed myself as one would speak to a companion with whom one is voyaging to the North Pole” (W, 201)). Are the characters therefore actually thinking in terms of language, making, like Bernard, “observations”164 to themselves and thus consciously transforming unverbalized thoughts into linguistic patterns?165 In one of the drafts, Rhoda, like Bernard, will also self-consciously address herself:

But you know what I, she said

---

164 “That is, I am a natural coiner of words, a blower of bubbles through one thing and another. And, striking off these observations spontaneously, I elaborate myself; differentiate myself and, listening to the voice that says as I stroll past, “Look! Take note of that!” I conceive myself called upon to provide, some winter’s night, a meaning for all my observations—a line that runs from one to another, a summing up that completes. But soliloquies in back streets soon pall. I need an audience.” (W, 82-83)

165 In the first draft, Woolf will describe how we verbalize our experiences in order to remember them, by naming them, we speak them, communicate them and thus make them exist:

the mind, like a vine,

buds has its coiled tendrils, which has made has forever now

to find an interpretation a phrase to encircle [ ] past

net things in; for otherwise they must perish. And then

when the phrase has been found, it must be spoken aloud,
to somebody, who But else.

(W, Draft I, page 17)
addressing herself very hurriedly in case she should be interrupted,

That's I’m that; I’m not this. Can’t be helped. One of the things to be noted.

like the moment at the puddle. Life has its book open. & I note

stages. (W, Draft I, page 202)

On the other hand, the soliloquies are being addressed as a whole to the reader by the overall narrator. Since, as we have argued, the verb “to say” draws attention to the very act of verbalization, it seems that Woolf, by drawing attention to the fact that the characters are thinking in terms of language, is questioning the very being of this language.

The complexity of the narrative voice(s) in the final version finds its origins in Woolf’s conception of the narratorial voice in the first drafts of the novel. A narrative can be very loosely defined as a story. As Barthes has said, “there are countless forms of narrative in the world” and mapping this area is a tricky business. Originally, Woolf had relied on a narrative similar to that of Mrs Dalloway, written in a stream of consciousness style, the story being “told” by what some literary scholars would call an external “omniscient” narrator who would periodically plunge us into the minds of the characters. Virginia Woolf will often describe this narrator in the first drafts of her novel, writing in her diary that

I have thought of this device: to put
The Lonely Mind
separately in The Moths, as if it were a person. I don’t know – it seems possible.

(D3: 251)

But giving body and consistency to a type of narratorial voice which traditionally would otherwise have remained implicit and taken for granted by the readers, thus transforming him into a character a part entière, will however prove to be particularly problematical as the voice of any omniscient narrator is very close, if not identical as

---

John Morreal would argue, to that of the author, a problem Woolf was very much aware of, questioning in her diary whether she should be in fact the narrator:

> Yesterday morning I made another start on The Moths, but that won't be its title. & several problems cry out at once to be solved. Who thinks it? And am I outside the thinker? One wants some device which is not a trick. (D3: 257)

It is true that her description of the “Lonely Mind” in the opening pages of the first draft will be close to expressing the being of a God-like author who may decide on the life or death of the fictional characters in one stroke of the pen, which she described in one draft as “a judge, or lawgiver” (W, Draft I, page 124). The numerous corrections and deletions and versions of this passage reveal the trouble Woolf had in articulating her idea:

> However, the lonely person, man or woman, young or aged, for it does not matter – who would be thinking there, in the room, thinking, the power that centralises, what must else be lost, gathering together in its mind, not [ ] by any means, all that was said in the garden, but some fragments, & then, setting to work to make them coherent; for the would now begin, Even in this pale dawn to making a coherency of them, would now drew the book to opened the book & wrote; thought; myself

> I am here trying to telling the story of the world from the beginning; making from the after all, I am no longer not tossing on the waves concerned with the single life; I am but am the thinker who compares; & now thinking it together - to so that making unity; & in the hope that there will be when I have this scene (W, Draft I, page 6)

> Then the shapeless form, the dreamer, the thinker,

---

which who leant over the table, before the open windows, in the dawn, trying to collect fragments, what which ever fragments made that of the perfect vessel which time had broken (W, Draft I, page 21)

Two pages before she started writing Section 1 for a second time running, Woolf suddenly questioned the nature of this absolute and omnipotent narrator/author figure as she found herself at a turning point in the story, Rhoda having decided to “present” her nosegay of flowers to somebody, but not knowing to whom - at this point, Woolf pauses (cf. the double strikethrough in the manuscript) and in the next passage, questions the act of writing itself, in particular, the traditional overbearing authority of a sole narratorial voice. From the question, whom should Rhoda give the flowers to, Woolf moves on to ask who is in fact telling this story, who is taking such decisions as to whom Rhoda should give the flowers, and finally, she will examine more closely what the role of this narrator should be, defined in terms of the creative authorial voice of the novel itself:

& she hastened to the spot whence I had come, with her garland
That I might there present it – O! to whom?
O to whom? she asked.

which, or it might be old or young – it matters not -
Here the mind of the very old person, man or woman, who brooding among the torn fragments, putting them together sweeping the things on the table top brings thought she will observed the pale
The shadow that thought among the glass, plate & books was now becoming visible. Under the tent of thought it sat brooding. It was bent. It was pondering. It was conscious of some curious drift which made it turn first here, then there.
It was to itself extrem possessed of an extraordinary omnipotence.

168 The gender of the narrator is a problem in itself – neither masculine nor feminine, it is however difficult to speak of the narrator as a neutral “it” and to use the feminine gender may be confusing since Woolf tried to disassociate herself from her narrator.
I am the judge. I am the seer. I am the force that arranges. 
I am the thing in which all this exists. Certainly without me it would perish. I can give it order. Rheda now feels I perceive what is bound to happen. I am capable of disposing of these innumerable children – at least mine is the power of drawing conclusions. [...] And I will now tell them the story of Rhoda, for a That indeed was the question. To whom can one give things? (W, Draft I, page 39)

Virginia Woolf had hoped that by giving more consistency to the narrator/author figure she would somehow be able to express through him a unified account of the interwoven individualities of her characters rather than fragmenting the perspectives into an “apparent reckless cutting into short lengths of the long string so that there was no continuous thread that one might draw out & out through one’s fingers, saying monotonously & methodically, this is it; this is it.” (W, Draft I, page 72),\(^{169}\) within an a-chronological (and ungendered) frame-work as not only would s/he stand out of the flow of time in which the beings which s/he had created evolved – containing at once their past, present and future -, but s/he would also synchronize the parallel strands of their individual lifepaths, telescoping both time and space:

“I am not concerned with the single life but with lives together. 
I am trying to find in the folds of the past such fragments as time, who has broken the perfect vessel, keeps safe.”

There was nobody to hear these words; they were spoken, perhaps not even aloud, by somebody whose sex could not be distinguished, in this very early light.

Indeed, accuracy & He or she bent brooded in the dawn over a table spread with odds & ends; there was a napkin & a flower pot & a book. “I am telling the story of the world from the beginning; & in a small room, whose windows were open. & (The Waves Draft I, page 42)

\(^{169}\) as Faulkner will do in The Sound and Fury, for instance, see below.
Further references to the "Lonely Mind" abound in Draft I which emphasize the control which its voice has over the story, whilst at the same time, the traits of its physical (human) being were progressively obscured – passing from a "person" (W, Draft I, 39) to a "rather vague, apparently very large, yet indefinite figure" (W, Draft I, 60), a "mind in the hood" (W, Draft I, 63), a "tent shaped shadow" (W, Draft I, 60, 81), a "green eye in a cave" (W, Draft I, 67), and finally to an eyeless (W, Draft I, 69, 72, 89) "hollow" (W, Draft I, 89), a "spot of green moss on the walls of a cave" (W, Draft I, 69, 89), a shadow hidden in the "capacious fold of a hood" (W, Draft I, 113, 114), an eyeless "curtain-like shape" (W, Draft I, 124). None of these descriptions of the 'Lonely Mind' will survive Woolf's editing. The difficulties of making the figure of 'The Lonely Mind' tangible were no doubt too great and Woolf gave up the idea as such, but the ghost of the notion can still be felt very strongly throughout the novel - it seems indeed that the functions of a central and centralizing narrator/author figure were finally split into four distinct but interrelated devices:

- first, a purely literary device, i.e. the strange shared uniform tone of the six equally balanced "speaking" characters\textsuperscript{170} whose voices and thoughts are reported to us by an unidentified extraneous narratorial/authorial voice close, if not identical to that of the original 'Lonely Mind' as well as Woolf's own authorial voice,
- secondly, the set of poetic interludes narrated by an anonymous voice which were strongly associated with the 'Lonely Mind' in the holograph drafts,
- thirdly, the increasingly important role given to the character of Bernard, a writer, who will come to dominate the novel’s narrative as he will sum up the whole story from the beginning in Section 9,
- and finally, the "summing up" role of Section 9 in itself.

Most importantly, Bernard will be constantly questioning the act of writing itself in what appears to be a metanarrative mise en abyme of the text in which he features. \textit{The Waves} is in this way just as much a novel about the process of writing

\textsuperscript{170} There is no differentiation between the styles of speaking of the six characters, in contrast to Faulkner, for instance, who uses a similar device in \textit{The Sound and The Fury}, i.e. a story told from the perspective of four characters in four separate consecutive sections, but with their own voices and their own particular inflections.
itself, “a sketchpad for an unwritten novel”,\textsuperscript{171} as it is an instance of this process, thus highlighting through the original use of the narratorial voice(s), its own achievements and shortcomings. By thus engaging in a covert critical dialogue with his textually extraneous dopplegänger, Bernard’s voice will finally totally merge in Section 9 with the extraneous narrator/author to the point that we cannot determine who is in fact telling us the story in the first place – Bernard, the narrator/author (Woolf herself?) or any of the five other “speaking” voices - Susan, Jinny, Neville, Louis and Rhoda – as Bernard picks up and uses their phrases. As Mark Hussey will comment,

The problem of voice, that is never solved in \textit{The Waves}, is most particularly Bernard’s, a confusion that leads to inextricably complicated identifications. [...] This dislocation of identity reflects the crisis the book generates. Throughout, Bernard has questioned the nature of his own being in an empirical fashion quite unlike any other of Woolf’s characters. The limits of subjectivity [...] are reached as Bernard tries to undo the tautological knot of identity. \textsuperscript{172}

But we cannot agree with Hussey that \textit{The Waves} is intrinsically “flawed”\textsuperscript{173} and therefore an “aesthetic failure”\textsuperscript{174} because “Bernard’s summing-up is not a uniting of the characters; it does not create that single human being he says they saw laid out before them on the restaurant table at their reunion dinner. The conclusion is merely one more story in the repertoire of \textit{The Waves}”.\textsuperscript{175} On the contrary, it seems to us that Virginia Woolf’s aim was not to create a “single human being” but rather to grasp from without the multiple perspectives of multiple human beings – the novel is not about Bernard trying to express the “effect of the whole” but about the extraneous narrator/author, Woolf herself, expressing the effect of the whole – a whole which includes Bernard. Of course, Bernard does fail to become all six. Bernard, after all, is only one of the seven characters, the embodiment of the (failed) literary facet of the narrator/author whose voice and presence encompasses all seven characters at once. Because Bernard is within the narrative himself, he can never totally merge with the other characters as he is evolving on the same fictional plane as they are. It is up to

\textsuperscript{171} Mark Hussey, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{ibid.}, p. 91-93.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{ibid.}, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{ibid.}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{ibid.}, p. 91.
the extraneous narratorial/authorial voice to serve as uniting force and it is through the fictional writer, Bernard, that the narrator/author may engage with the creative process itself. In a way, we are made to see the author as reflected through the eyes of Bernard. It is only by taking into account the underlying musical model that this aspect comes to light, when the question of expressing the multiple voicing of multiple identities is itself described (metanarratively) in terms of a musical composition – to quote again:

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—again like music. What a symphony with its concord and its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. With Neville, “Let’s discuss Hamlet.” With Louis, science. With Jinny, love. (W, 182)

The overall narrator succeeds where Bernard, being one of the characters himself, will fail. The effect which Virginia Woolf was after in *The Waves* was that of a “symphony”. It can only be understood in relation to her conception of the narrative voices. If we were to compare a symphony with a novel, who, indeed, may be said to be “leading” the symphony? Nobody and everybody, it is the sum of all the instruments. In a symphony (or, for that matter, in chamber music or solo piano works), even though each instrument has a voice in itself, its voice only makes sense within the whole texture of the orchestration, no one instrument ever predominating over the others. There is no “sole” narrator in a symphony, if one may speak of a narrator in the first place:176 the themes are passed from instrument to instrument,

176 The problem of narration in music has been and is still a hotly debated topic which we have already mentioned elsewhere. But the problem we wish to highlight here is not “narration” proper but the notion of musical “narrator”. Obsessed by the question as to whether music can tell stories or not, most critics and musicologists have however failed to address the question of the musical “narrator”. If we put aside the notion that music may or may not indeed “tell stories” and follow Woolf’s formalist approach to this art as we concluded in Part I, one of the major features of symphonic works (this however would also go for piano sonatas) is the obvious absence of a predominant narratorial “voice”. Carolyn Abbate will speak of the “music” narrating in ‘What the Sorcerer Said’, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Spring 1989, p. 222, which is in fact the equivalent of saying the “novel” is narrating – quite an untenable proposition. Other theorists will simply assume that it is the “composer” narrating – a problem in itself (cf. ‘Schumann and Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies’, by Anthony Newcomb, *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Autumn, 1987, p. 167). The interpreter or conductor is often seen to “speak” the music but usually he is considered as a mere intermediary between the voice of the composer/music and the audience. But the question remains as to what in the “music” is
their effect, colour and texture in constant mutation - each “voice” (or, metaphorically, instrument) contributing in turn to the whole effect. If we were therefore to situate the complex “problem of voice” back into the musical realm, what Hussey perceives as an overall negative and a failure because he short-sightedly focuses on Bernard only, becomes transformed into a positive as Woolf successfully manages to fragment the narratorial voice so that in the end, there is no one perspective, the effect being that of a symphony made up of the six parallel lives of the novel’s six speaking characters.

But the symphonic model is not without its problems. If it may have given Woolf the model for writing an “a-narratore” narrative, the question remains as to what extent its other features may have contributed to Woolf’s musicalization. Interestingly, the complex notion of simultaneity, is usually seen to be the stumbling block of many failed interdisciplinary experiments. Gerald Levin will indeed reject the musical model of the “fugue” because polyphony cannot be achieved as such in a novel:

Whether a literary style or representation of experience can be musical or “fugal” in any exact meaning of these words remains a serious question for criticism, and it was a question for Virginia Woolf. One difficulty is immediately apparent. Voices in the novel cannot be heard simultaneously, though images and phrases can pass from one monologue to another. To quote Arnold Schoenberg, “the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception.”

I would argue however that simultaneity has been achieved by Woolf in *The Waves* as long as we bear in mind the role and presence of the shaping voice of the ‘Lonely Mind’ which merges totally with that of the six characters whilst at the same time having a depth of being in itself. Levin, like Hussey, by scrutinizing the text at too close a range, can only see the speaking voices of the six characters and as such, it is quite evident that none of them speak at the same time as the others and as such, they narrating (or “speaking” or “presenting” the music) to the audience? And even if music is considered to “narrate” without actually narrating any meaning as such (*ibid*, p. 227; see also Jean-Jacques Nattiez (transl. Katharine Ellis), ‘Can one Speak of Narrativity in Music’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 115, No. 2, 1990, pp. 240-257), that still does not solve the problem of who/what is narrating. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, “a narrative cannot take place without a narrator and a listener (or reader). This is a banal statement, yet one that has been so far insufficiently used, in ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative, *op.cit.*, p. 260.

fail to live up to a polyphonic musical model. That Woolf should have made the characters "speak", that is, given them an aural nature cannot be taken for granted. Like in a symphony, the voices are made to sound, "each play[ing] his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be" (*W*, 182). But again, the text is taken here at its face value. Many studies have tried to get round the problem of the impossibility of expressing "polyphony" by highlighting the way Woolf has, 1) metaphorically "woven" the soliloquies into a semblance of simultaneity through "rhythm" and, 2) as Levin suggests, created a web of internal correspondences of shared phrases and images across the soliloquies. But these devices, however musical they may be, as we shall see below, do not create polyphony and looking at them as such can only undermine any attempt at proving that the polyphony is real. We do not argue this – the polyphony does not lie in the interjected passages. Where Woolf has achieved polyphony is in the superposition of the characters' voices and the voice of the 'Lonely Mind'. To the question "who is speaking" in the novel, there is no one answer – Bernard, Susan, Neville, the 'Lonely Mind', etc. and therein lies Woolf's musical achievement.

In conclusion to this chapter, I would like to propose a diagram which highlights Virginia Woolf's idiosyncratic approach to music and summarizes her conception of the musicalization of fiction in *The Waves*, whilst at the same time outlining an alternative methodological pathway to the study of the various aspects of (other) potential musicalized novels (see Figure 23 below). This diagram is an example of an applied interdisciplin ary framework which builds on that which we outlined theoretically above (cf. Figure 22). Throughout our investigation we have returned time and time again to the centrality of the musical paradigm in relation to the problem of expressing in literature three key interrelated concepts: simultaneity, complexity and unity. Indeed, only in music are these three concepts concurrent. These form what we call the three "overarching aesthetic principles" in our diagram below. We investigated fully in Chapter 4 the function of music in Woolf's expression of the simultaneity of voicing in terms of literary polyphony. This is indeed the first stumbling block of any study of the musicalization of fiction and one which needed addressing first and foremost. Having thus established the modalities of Woolf's musicalization of her narratorial strategies in *The Waves*, we shall be looking in more detail in Chapter 5 below at the way she brings into play other musical forms in order
to express the concepts of complexity and unity as exemplified in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves*. 
Figure 23. Applied interdisciplinary typology: diagram of the musicalization of *The Waves*

**LITERATURE**

*The Waves*

- multiplicity of lives/voices (cf. the original image of thousands of babies being tumbled out onto the beach by the waves in Draft I, page 63, cf. also *W*, 182)
- "six little fish" scooped out of the "cauldron" (*W*, 182)
  - Bernard
  - Neville
  - Louis
  - Jinny
  - Susan
  - Neville = literature (*W*, 182)
  - Louis = science (*W*, 182)
  - Jinny = love (*W*, 182)
  - Rhoda = "nymph of the fountain" (*W*, 183)
  - Susan = "I hate, I love" (*W*, 176)
  - Bernard = individuality (*W*, 199)

- concord/discord

- "effect of the whole" (*W*, 182)

**MUSIC**

**MUSICAL METAPHOR**

- instruments (polyphony) = characters
  - Musical themes (thematic transformation) = philosophical topics/personalities
  - consonance/dissonance (harmony) = accord/conflict
  - Musical forms (sonata form) = structural role of final soliloquy

**NON-METAPHORICAL MUSICALIZATION OF FICTION**

- polyphonic texture
- thematic transformation
- musical forms (sonata form)

**OVERARCHING AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES**

- simultaneity
- complexity
- unity

programmatic interpretation

non-programmatic interpretation

purely musical criteria
Chapter 5. Virginia Woolf and the "soul" of music

The whole of rhythm and harmony have been pressed, like dried flowers, into the neatly divided scales, the tones and semitones of the pianoforte. The sagest and easiest attribute of music – its tune – is taught, but rhythm, which is its soul, is allowed to escape like the winged creature it is. (‘Street Music’, E1: 30)

Chapter 4 tested the established melopoetic theories in a bid to propose an alternative interdisciplinary approach to musicalized fiction by taking the problem of simultaneity, or literary “polyphony”, in The Waves as a touchstone. In order to put into further practise the new interdisciplinary approach we proposed above and to highlight the ways in which music is also a model for complexity and unity (see Figure 23 above), Chapter 5 aims to investigate in more detail Woolf’s understanding of the role of rhythm in literature and how this affects her approach to musical forms in her novels. We shall first endeavour to (re-)define the particular modalities of Woolf’s conception of literary “rhythm” in relation to a poetical understanding of the musical qualities of literary texts as exemplified in Woolf’s style, highlighting in particular the shortcomings of an investigation of her musicality on the linguistic micro-level. We shall show that, on the contrary, Virginia Woolf’s understanding of the role of music in literature is primarily motivated by her conception of the novel’s expressive modalities on the macro-level. This leads us to consider the potential musicalization of their overarching structure, thus bringing into play the problem of the artistic expression of complexity and unity. Our analysis of Mrs Dalloway in terms of fugue will illustrate the former, whilst the latter will lead us to return to the question of rhythm in a reading of The Waves in terms of sonata-form in which unity is achieved through a large-scale “rhythmical” structure. Our approach to both Mrs Dalloway and The Waves in this chapter is directly derived from the melopoetic typology we established in Chapter 4. To conclude this final chapter, we shall investigate the modalities of the rhythmical essence of Woolf’s aesthetic vision.
a. The rhythm of words

A study of Virginia Woolf’s musicality would not be complete without a mention of the place and function of rhythm in Woolf’s aesthetics. The notion of “rhythm” has indeed given rise to many interdisciplinary assumptions and loose musical analogies. Etymologically, “rhythm” comes from the Ancient Greek word ρυθμός, from ῥέων, “to flow”. Rhythm can loosely be understood as a way to describe motion through the sequential breakdown of movement (or change) as it occurs in time and space, into discrete moments. No one definition is however satisfactory since the very notion of “rhythm” would appear to contain the paradoxical idea that the flow, fusion and continuity we experience is in fact apprehended and expressed in terms of succession, segmentation and discontinuity.1 The notion of rhythm implies that there must be a discernable pattern in the sequential breakdown of motion, i.e. regular or recurring occurrences of similar elements. *Vice versa*, the perception of a pattern usually implies the presence of a rhythm, which is one of the reasons one may speak of “rhythm” in painting, though the pictural use of the term is far removed from its original temporal context. If anything, rhythm is in time what pattern is in space. That music is the art *par excellence* which relies on rhythm goes without saying. Indeed, music brings into play at its most fundamental level, perceptible patterns of sound as they evolve in time. The question of rhythm in prose, however, is a far more complex issue since it potentially involves both the presence of rhythm on the literal technical level, i.e. the potential audible rhythms of the acoustic properties of language itself, the patterns of sounds usually associated with poetry, and on a metaphorical level, arising connotatively within the subject matter of the texts. The question we shall first be asking ourselves in this chapter concerns the extent to which critics are justified in turning what is after all a rather vague and general notion of

---

1 Needless to say, this has puzzled philosophers for centuries and is still the subject of many contemporary debates within modern philosophy and mathematics (cf. Z.K. Silagadze, ‘Zeno meets modern science’, Budker Institute of Nuclear Physics, Novosibirsk, Russia, online publication: [http://uk.arxiv.org/PS_cache/physics/pdf/0505/0505042.pdf](http://uk.arxiv.org/PS_cache/physics/pdf/0505/0505042.pdf)). That the tick of the clock conventionally segments the minutes into sixty seconds, the hours into sixty minutes and the days into twenty-four hours, etc., regardless of our actual experience, will haunt Virginia Woolf’s imagination and her narratives will constantly feature the disrupting “jar” of the passing of the hours — from Big Ben’s “leaden circles” in *Mrs Dalloway*, to the shock of present time in *Orlando*: the clock ticked louder and louder until there was a terrific explosion right in her ear. Orlando leapt as if she had been violently struck on the head. Ten times she was struck. In fact it was ten o’clock in the morning. It was the eleventh of October. It was 1928. It was the present moment. (*O*, 268)
“rhythm” into one of the major aspects of Woolf’s musicalization of fiction, before giving, ourselves, an interpretation of the rhythmic essence of Woolf’s aesthetics of art.

It must be noted that Virginia Woolf made a distinction between writing “musically” and always thinking of her books as “music”. Whereas she is “not regularly musical”, in a poetical sense, she “always” thinks of her books as “music” before she writes them, in a conceptual sense (L6: 426). That this “musicality” had something to do with “rhythm” is undeniable: indeed, Woolf was replying at the time to a remark on the “rhythm” of her style made by her friend, Elizabeth Trevelyan, who not only was referring to the “musicality” of Woolf’s biography of Roger Fry but that of all of her novels. She thus wrote to Woolf:

I was always conscious of a beautiful rhythm in the book – perhaps in the sense that Roger used the word? – but also more closely in the musical sense, and in a way which I have felt before in yr books.2

It is therefore essential to refine and redefine the scope of such terms as “musicality” and “musical” when dealing with Woolf’s writing, bearing in mind that when one analyses the relation between her writings and music, it is very easy to get drawn into a relatively simple study of the musicality of her language (looking at reiterations as an expression of rhythm, for instance, as will do Allen McLaurin3), as opposed to grasping the far wider reaching implications of the originality of her innovative musical aesthetics.

The discrepancy between the potential respective meanings of the words “musicality” and “musical”, epitomized in the nebulous use of the generic term “music” in literary criticism,4 has been remarked upon by Huxley, who, in his novel

4 also problematic is the type of “music” which is in question. The ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl will indeed raise the point in his essay “Musical Thinking’ and ‘Thinking About Music’ in Ethnomusicology: An Essay of Personal Interpretation”, Musical Worlds – New directions in the Philosophy of Music, ed. Phillip Alperson, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, p. 171. In our particular study, though we mainly focus on what is commonly known as the “classical” Western music of the past 400 years or so, which is what Virginia Woolf herself knew, there may be some very interesting parallels to be made between the Modernist musicalization of fiction and other musical styles, in particular primitive or tribal music, considering Virginia Woolf’s interest in particular in the prehistoric origins of music (cf. Woolf’s draft of ‘Anon’).
Point Counter Point, famously questions the nature of contemporary writing and its relation to music:

The musicalization of fiction. Not in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound. (Pleuvent les bleus baisers des astres taciturnes. Mere glossolalia). But on a large scale, in the construction. Meditate on Beethoven. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions.5

We shall return below to the implications of Huxley’s understanding of what he considers in music contributes to literature, in particular the idea of music informing the large scale construction of novels, but what first catches our attention here is that he goes beyond expressing an interest in what is after all the most commonplace of relations between music and literature as found primarily in poetry, to bring to light the specificity of the potential musicalization of prose. His words thus encapsulate the duality of the Modernist interest in music. On the one hand, the Modernist writer is attracted to handling language itself in a “musical” way, and on the other hand, the musicalization of Modernist fiction serves to redefine the literary function of music in prose away from a poetical understanding of literary musicality. Whereas the former type of musicalization follows a long tradition of poetical musicality and is always a very noticeable feature of the texts in question, failing to perceive the latter type of musicalization will lead to profound misunderstandings as to the nature of musicalized fiction. This profound duality permeates the corpus of critical works dealing with Woolf’s “musical” style. Before we go any further, we must pause and ask ourselves, to what extent Woolf’s style could be said to be musical in a “poetical” sense, and by extension, to what extent are the critics justified in considering “glossolalia” as music?

(i) “Dancing to the barrel organ”, music, words and poetry

5 Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point, op.cit., p. 408 – the quotation in this passage in French is from Nocturne (published in Gammes (1887)) by the American poet Stuart Merrill (1863-1915), a poem which draws extensively on the sonorities of language (online at http://www.poetes.com/merrill/nocturne.htm).
To what extent does the *poetical* model inform Woolf’s musicalization of fiction? It is true that in her 1905 essay on ‘Street Music’, Woolf asserted that modern literature is “degenerate” primarily because it has “forgotten its allegiance” to music and “we should invent – or rather remember – the innumerable metres which we have so long outraged, and which would restore both prose and poetry to the harmonies that the ancients heard and observed” (*E1*: 31). Indeed, “tiring of searching for what is needed to complete the incomplete “half-truth” of “rubbish-reading”,

the desire grows upon us to have done with half-statements and approximations; to cease from searching out the minute shades of human characters, to enjoy the greater abstractness, the purer truth of fiction. Thus we create the mood, intense and generalised, unaware of detail, but stressed by some regular, recurrent beat, whose natural expression is poetry. (*CE2*: 6)

That the rhythmical is thus linked in Woolf’s mind to the poetical cannot be denied and the slip from poetry to rhythm and by extension, to musicality is thenceforth rather easy to make. It is not surprising if, of all of Virginia Woolf’s novels, The Waves, described by Stella McNichol as “Virginia Woolf’s greatest poetic achievement”, 6 is probably the one which has attracted the most attention from those scholars’ investigating the “musicality” of her style. As William Plomer has commented, the “special genius of her rare and solitary spirit reached its purest expression in The Waves, an exquisite, subjective book nearer to poetry and music than the novel”. 7 Stella McNichol will similarly assert that,

to claim that Virginia Woolf is a poet who used prose fiction as her medium [...] is likewise to assert something both about the content and about the form of her novels. Often she has the cadences, sometimes even the rhymes, associated with lyric poetry. 8

Virginia Woolf did not object to a “poeticizing” of prose as such, but rather objected to the way poetry had been incorporated into the novel in “patches”, without having really been fully assimilated or synthesized into the specific modalities of

---

prose. This tells us a good deal about what aspects of the poetical idiom Woolf was attracted to. For Woolf, poetry in prose very often remained poetry in prose, rather than a new hybrid of the two genres. Woolf will ask in an essay which compares the expressive modalities of poetry to the fiction,

but can prose, we may ask, adequate though it is to deal with the common and the complex – can prose say the simple things which are so tremendous? Give the sudden emotions which are so surprising? Can it chant the elegy, or hymn the love, or shriek in terror, or praise the rose, the nightingale, or the beauty of the night? Can it leap at one spring at the heart of its subject as the poet does? I think not. That is the penalty it pays for having dispensed with the incantation and the mystery, with rhyme and metre. It is true that prose writers are daring; they are constantly forcing their instrument to make the attempt. But one has always a feeling of discomfort in the presence of the purple patch of the prose poem. The objection to the purple patch, however, is not that it is purple but that it is a patch. (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, E4: 437)

The reason the “purple patch” of poetry in prose will forever remain a “patch” is that it is infused with the language of poetry as well as the imaginative sphere of poetry. Woolf will give the example of Meredith and Charlotte Brontë, who, despite their attempts at integrating poetic elements into their novels, failed to succeed in fully blending prose and poetry:

These passages [from Meredith and Charlotte Brontë] are eloquent, lyrical, splendid; they read very well cut out and stuck in an anthology; but in the context of the novel they make us uncomfortable. [...] We feel the jerk and the effort; we are half-woken from that trance of consent and illusion in which our submission to the power of the writer's imagination is most complete. (E4: 437)

It is precisely the style of poetry which, in the context of the novel, only serves to jerk us out of the particular rhythm of prose. The conventions of its technique (the rhymes, rhythms and metre) are thus intrinsically incompatible with what she admires in the prose idiom which she describes as the “democratic art of prose; its freedom, its fearlessness, its flexibility” (E4: 436). On the contrary, Woolf is attracted to the imaginative side of poetry, that which expresses the “imagination, wit, fantasy” and “the relations of man to Nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams”, the way the poet
"transcends" the personal to express "the state and being of all human life" \( (E4: 436) \). The novel of the future, therefore, for Woolf, should endeavour to recapture the essence of poetry without necessarily relying on the artifice of poetry which she finds, even in poetry, distracting and constricting. In an answer to a letter from Janet Case, her friend and Greek tutor, the ambivalence of the term "musicality" is clearly in her mind. Case had written to Woolf praising the "musicality" of her style, in particular the way her language drew on the rhythms and sonorities of poetry. She implies however that what was important for Woolf was primarily the "way things are written" rather than the things in themselves, i.e. their meaning. Of course, Virginia Woolf strongly disagreed, as for her, any musicality of the language - which Woolf equates here with the "expression" - must be intrinsically linked to the "thought" expressed. If musicality there was, then it was not to be found primarily on the level of style alone but in the "thought" or the "matter" expressed by the author as well:

\[
\text{don't, I beg of you, father on me that doctrine of yours about the way things are written mattering and not the things: how can you accuse me of believing that? I don't believe you can possibly separate expression from thought in an imaginative work. The better a thing is expressed, the more completely it is thought. To me, Stevenson is a poor writer, because his thought is poor, and therefore fidget though he may, his style is obnoxious. And I don't see how you can enjoy technique apart from the matter. (L3: 197)}
\]

Far from the superficial musicality of poetry, in which meaning and "music" are very often distinct and unrelated entities, for Woolf, the way the thing is expressed should necessarily correspond to the thing itself. The musicality must come from within rather than from without. Woolf will give Janet Case the example of the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins which she liked "better than any poetry for ever so long", because she will find that he does not write

\[
\text{mere rhythms and sense as most poets do, he makes a very strange jumble, so that what is apparently pure nonsense is at the same time very beautiful, and not nonsense at all. Now this carries out a theory of mine; but the poor man became a Jesuit, and they}
\]

discouraged him, and he became melancholy and died. I couldn't explain this without quoting however, and now I must go and wash. (L2: 379, 23 July 1919)\textsuperscript{10}

The poems of Hopkins had in fact only just been published in 1918 by his friend and fellow poet Robert Bridges, in an edition of only 750 copies, one of which was owned by Virginia Woolf.\textsuperscript{11} Woolf found his poetry of such interest that when invited to Garsington in July 1926 by Robert Bridges, she did not fail to ask to see Hopkins’ manuscripts which Bridges had collected for the 1918 publication.\textsuperscript{12} The originality of the style of Gerard Manley Hopkins comes from his theories on the technical aspects of the poetical idiom: he favoured indeed a free approach to metre and scansion which departed from the pre-set artificial rhythmical frame of conventional scansion by following the natural lilt of the phrases and words taking the variety and natural flow of musical rhythm as a model:

Note on the nature and history of Sprung Rhythm—Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things. For (1) it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them. (2) \textit{It is the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises.} (3) It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on; because, however these may have been once made in running rhythm, the terminations having dropped off by the change of language, the stresses come together and so the rhythm is sprung. (4) It arises in common verse when reversed or counterpointed, for the same reason.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} In another letter to Janet Case, in January 1920, Virginia finds the time to quote some lines of Hopkins which she particularly admired:

My dear Janet,

Here is Hopkins, whom I said I'd send. Might I have him back in time, since I spent 12/6 upon him and also haven't yet made him out. But I don't think you need this caution. Some are very lovely and quite plain; others such a mix of beauty and horror that it takes hours to sort them — for instance the long one on the wreck [\textit{The Wreck of the Deutschland}]. But how I love —

I have desired to go
Where springs not fail
To fields were flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

Yes, I should like to have written that myself. (L2: 415)

The poem quoted here by Woolf is 'Heaven — Haven', online: http://www.bartleby.com/122/

\textsuperscript{11} cf. D3: 93, footnote 4.

\textsuperscript{12} “I asked to see the Hopkins manuscripts, & I sat looking at them with that gigantic grasshopper Aldous [Huxley] folded up in a chair close by.” (D3: 93).

Hopkins’ theories on rhythm were inscribed visually within the manuscripts of his poems as he wrote not only the words of the poems but also a sort of “musical” score alongside them, clearly marking the unconventional stresses and particular rhythms he wished the reader to speak, to the point of writing musical “fermatas” above the sounds of certain syllables on which the reader was asked to pause (see Figure 24 below for an example of Hopkins’ poetry):

The [...] marks are easily understood, namely accents, where the reader might be in doubt which syllable should have the stress; slurs, that is loops over syllables, to tie them together into the time of one; little loops at the end of a line to shew that the rhyme goes on to the first letter of the next line; what in music are called pauses , to shew that the syllable should be dwelt on; and twirls , to mark reversed or counterpointed rhythm.15

Whereas Woolf will never go as far as Hopkins, it is clear to see why she admired the musicality of his style which was closer to “written prose”, as he himself asserted than to poetry as such, in particular in the intrinsic connection between the musicality of his “expression” and the meaning of his poems.17

14 He described a type of rhythm he created as a “contrapuntal” rhythm, as it served to inverse the strong and weak beats of conventional scansion and thus create a polyphony of rhythms: “If however the reversal is repeated in two feet running, especially so as to include the sensitive second foot, it must be due either to great want of ear or else is a calculated effect, the superinducing or mounting of a new rhythm upon the old; and since the new or mounted rhythm is actually heard and at the same time the mind naturally supplies the natural or standard foregoing rhythm, for we do not forget what the rhythm is that by rights we should be hearing, two rhythms are in some manner running at once and we have something answerable to counterpoint in music, which is two or more strains of tune going on together, and this is Counterpoint Rhythm.” (ibid., my italics)


16 Ibid.

17 Interestingly, American poet Hart Crane, like Woolf, was to write of Hopkin’s musical style that, "Until now, I hadn't realized that words could come so near a transfiguration into pure musical notation-at the same (time) retaining every minute literal signification! what a man and what a daring!", Hart Crane (Letter to Mrs.T.W. Simpson, Dec. 5, 1926, Letters III, Mariani, 292), quoted in Chantal Bizzini, abstract for a lecture, ‘Victorian English poet, G.M.Hopkins and Hart Crane: visionary poets and witnesses of their time’, Gerard Manley Hopkins 2003 Summer School, online: http://www.gerardmanlevhopkins.org/lectures_2003/hart_crane.html.
Figure 24. Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘Spring and Fall’ (1880). This poem is described in a note by Francis Bridges as an example of “sprung rhythm” (note the accented syllables Is. 1, 3, 5, 11 and 14).

MÁRGARÉT, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Áh! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórow’s springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

In effect, Virginia Woolf’s musicality lies less in the sonorities and rhythms of the words themselves than in their meaning. As she one day wrote to her nephew, Julian Bell, the modern novelist must have “a lump of fire in one’s brain, or the new form is merely a pose”. It is quite easy to see why so many Woolf scholars have felt in *The Waves* that they were reading a work of poetry rather than prose. *The Waves* is indeed a novel which strikes one from the outset as expressing a distinct “musicality” of the language, from the “interludes” which punctuate the novel’s main text,

---

described by many critics as “prose poems”,20 to the opening words of the main body of the text:

‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.’

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’

‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.’

‘I see a globe,’ said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.’

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads.’

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’

‘Look at the spider’s web on the corner of the balcony,’ said Bernard. ‘It has beads of water on it, drops of white light.’

‘The leaves are gathered round the window like pointed ears,’ said Susan.

‘A shadow falls on the path,’ said Louis, ‘like an elbow bent.’ (W, 6)

Not only is such an opening visually akin to poetry as each line evokes one specific image, but the images are quite extraordinary in the imprecision and suggestiveness of that “mood, intense and generalized, unaware of detail, but stressed by some regular, recurrent beat, whose natural expression is poetry” (CE2: 6): “I hear something”, “I hear a sound”, “I see a ring” (W, 6, my italics). The parallel structure of these opening phrases create a quasi incantatory rhythm (I see a ring; I see a slab; I hear a sound; I see a globe—each line begins with an anapest rhythm, three short and one long, then followed by one short, one long, one short—said Bernard; said Susan; said Rhoda; said Neville). The repetition of the words “I”, “a” and “said” also contribute to creating a specific sub-rhythm of sonorities, whilst the alliterations (i.e. in /l/: “loop of light”, /s/: “see a slab”, /tʃ/ and /p/: “cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp”, /d/: “down in a drop”, etc.) create a heightened sense of alternating rhythmic movement and poise. It is not surprising if, for one anonymous critic,

the novel has turned into something very like a poem. This incisive and unflagging prose is as rapid as verse, and the utterances follow one another with a sort of rhythmical incantation. Sometimes they are frankly antiphons, and one always has that sense of a response; the book moves to that measure. This formal effect recurs with the further settings which have given it its title; prefixed to each movement of it there is a background of the sea, with changes from dawn to sunset.21

But for Virginia Woolf, the style of the opening of *The Waves* is not meant to be a poem but rather to reflect the underlying expression and meaning of the particular moment she captured in those pages, i.e. the first untarnished perceptions of the children as they wake up in the nursery. As Bernard says:

I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz. I need a howl; a cry. When the storm crosses the marsh and sweeps over me where I lie in the ditch unregarded I need no words. Nothing neat. Nothing that comes down with all its feet on the floor. None of those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making wild music, false phrases. I have done with phrases. (*W*, 209)

The short clipped phrases and the simple rhythms of the opening pages of *The Waves* give the effect of a language which transcends the "wild music" of the "false phrases" of poetry, which resonate and echo, break and chime and fall with all their feet down onto the ground, too neat, too conventional: they only serve to obscure the truth and sincerity of the moment. From writing musically to writing nonsense are two different things altogether, as Harold Child ironically pointed out of Woolf’s style.22 In fact, in *The Waves*, rhythm is depicted negatively as a sign of habit which only serves to obscure the spontaneity and truth of the moment, as Bernard will find in his final soliloquy:

‘So into the street again, swinging my stick, looking at wire trays in stationers’ shop-windows, at baskets of fruit grown in the colonies, murmuring Pillicock sat on

---

22 Harold Child, *op. cit.*, p. 87-88 (see also below, p. 115).
Pillicock's hill, or Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, or The World's great age begins anew, or Come away, come away, death—mingling nonsense and poetry, floating in the stream. Something always has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday: Wednesday, Tuesday. Each spreads the same ripple. The being grows rings, like a tree. Like a tree, leaves fall.

'For one day as I leant over a gate that led into a field, the rhythm stopped; the rhymes and the hummings, the nonsense and the poetry. A space was cleared in my mind. I saw through the thick leaves of habit. (W, 200-201)

For Bernard, this was a moment of utter revelation, "it was like the eclipse when the sun went out and left the earth, flourishing in full summer foliage, withered, brittle, false" (W, 202). A few lines later, Bernard will ask,

how then does light return to the world after the eclipse of the sun? Miraculously. [...] So the landscape returned to me; so I saw fields rolling in waves of colour beneath me, but now with this difference; I saw but was not seen. I walked unshadowed; I came unheralded. From me had dropped the old cloak, the old response; the hollowed hands that beats back sounds. Thin as a ghost, leaving no trace where I trod, perceiving merely, I walked alone in a new world, never trodden; brushing new flowers, unable to speak save in a child's words of one syllable; without shelter from phrases — I who have made so many. (W, 203)

It was only when the false security of the sounds and rhythms of language was relinquished that Bernard, "for a moment [...] had sat on the turf somewhere high above the flow of the sea and the sound of the woods, had seen the house, the garden, and the waves breaking. The old nurse who turns the pages of the picture-book had stopped and had said, 'Look. This is the truth' (W, 204), the truth which escapes words: "There are no words. Blue, red - even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through. How describe or say anything in articulate words again?" (W, 204). Several times in the novel, words thus fail him as he finds that music would be more appropriate than language in expressing the more mysterious, unaccountable and as yet unexplored facets of human character:

But there should be music, some wild carol. Through the window should come a hunting-song from some rapid unapprehended life—a sound that shouts among the hills
and dies away. What is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for, what turns symmetry to nonsense—that comes suddenly to my mind, thinking of him. The little apparatus of observation is unhinged. \(W, 172\)

A few pages later, describing a moment of intense emotion, he turns yet again to music, lamenting the shortcomings of literature, “these flagging foolish transcripts” which fail to grasp the “flying” intensity and essence of the moment:

I arrived all in a lather at her house; exchanged tokens but did not marry her, being no doubt unripe for that intensity.

‘Here again there should be music. Not that wild hunting-song, Percival’s music; but a painful, guttural, visceral, also soaring, lark-like, pealing song to replace these flagging, foolish transcripts—how much too deliberate! how much too reasonable! — which attempt to describe the flying moment of first love. \(W, 177\)

It is not Woolf’s business to play with the plasticity of the words for the sake of it and Woolf will be amazed that the young poets of her day will still write according to the traditional rules and conventions of poetry. In an essay on Logan Pearsall Smith’s anthology of English prose,\(^{23}\) Virginia Woolf will write:

all I will venture is a sigh of wonder and amazement that when there is prose before us with its capacities and possibilities, its power to say new things, make new shapes, express new passions, young people should still be dancing to a barrel organ and choosing words because they rhyme. \(E3: 175\)

She later developed this idea in her ‘Letter to a Young Poet’ (1932), in which she satirized the stylistic constraints poets put themselves under and humorously (as always) acclaimed the stylistic freedom of the novelist:

But before I begin, I must own up to those defects, both natural and acquired, which, as you will find, distort and invalidate all that I have to say about poetry. The lack of a sound university training has always made it impossible for me to distinguish between an iambic and a dactyl, and if this were not enough to condemn one for ever, the

practice of prose has bred in me, as in most prose writers, a foolish jealousy, a righteous indignation—anyhow, an emotion which the critic should be without. For how, we despised prose writers ask when we get together, could one say what one meant and observe the rules of poetry? Conceive dragging in “blade” because one had mentioned “maid”; and pairing “sorrow” with “borrow”? Rhyme is not only childish, but dishonest, we prose writers say. Then we go on to say, And look at their rules! How easy to be a poet! How strait the path is for them, and how strict! This you must do; this you must not. I would rather be a child and walk in a crocodile down a suburban path than write poetry, I have heard prose writers say. It must be like taking the veil and entering a religious order—observing the rites and rigours of metre. That explains why they repeat the same thing over and over again. Whereas we prose writers (I am only telling you the sort of nonsense prose writers talk when they are alone) are masters of language, not its slaves; nobody can teach us; nobody can coerce us; we say what we mean; we have the whole of life for our province. We are the creators, we are the explorers. . . (CE2: 183)

Virginia Woolf will often feature the absurdity of focusing on the plasticity of words in her works and essays. As she said in preparation for her 1937 BBC broadcast, ‘Words fail me’,24 Virginia Woolf will reflect on the onomatopoeic qualities of “new words” and note in her diary that “we can easily make new words. Squish squash: crick crack: But we cant use them in writing” (D5: 77). Virginia Woolf was furthermore well aware of the extreme “musical” literary experiments which many of her contemporaries were trying out. It is undeniable that using the “material” of poetry in a purely musical way was the focus of much twentieth century writers. Poets had always been drawn to the rhythms and sounds of words to give their works an accrued interest and depth of expression but it is only in the early years of the twentieth century that artists fully explored the concepts of linguistic expression from an entirely “musical” point of view, so much so, that they totally departed from the conventional use of language. As Hugo Ball asserted in his first Dada Manifesto in July 1916, “the word has become a thing by itself”:25 the word has become an object. One of the major questions we need to ask at this point is to what extent this extreme poetical “musicality” has anything to do with melopoetics as such. Systematic

24 an extract from this broadcast, spoken by Virginia Woolf herself, is available online on BBC 4’s website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcefour/audiointerviews/profilepages/woolfv1.shtml.
attempts were made at that moment to write works of literature which were in fact through and through a music based on the acoustic properties of language. These works were termed “sound poetry”, as found in Hugo Ball’s 1917 ‘Karawane’ (see Figure 25 below) or “abstract poetry”, as Edith Sitwell, one of Woolf’s literary acquaintances, called her own type of artistic experiment. Indeed, Sitwell will describe her Façade, as “abstract poems - that is, they are patterns of sound. They are...virtuoso exercises in technique of extreme difficulty, in the same sense as that in which certain studies by Liszt are studies in transcendental technique in music.”

Even though there is no evidence that Virginia Woolf ever came across Hugo Ball’s sound poetry, she did go to the Aoelian Hall on the 13th of June 1923 to hear the first

---

26 for examples of “sound poetry”, see www.ubu.com; cf. also Henri Chopin on his endeavours to invent a “new language”. See also Richard Kostelanetz’s definition of “text-sound”: “The term “text-sound” characterizes language whose principal means of coherence is sound, rather than syntax or semantics - where the sounds made by comprehensible words create their own coherence apart from denotative meanings” (http://www.ubu.com/papers/kostelanetz.html).


29 online at http://www.ubu.com/historical/sound/ball.html. This website also has a recording of a performance of this poem (by Trio Exvoco, LP ‘Futura Poesia Sonora’, Milan: Cramps Records).
Nessa is back & the London season of course in full swing. So I judged yesterday in the Aeolian Hall, listening, in a dazed way, to Edith Sitwell vociferating through the megaphone. [...] I should be describing Edith Sitwell’s poems, but I kept saying to myself ‘I dont really understand... I dont really admire.’ The only view, presentable view that I framed, was to the effect that she was monotonous. She has one tune only on her merry go round. And she makes her verse keep step accurately to the Hornpipe. This seems to be wrong; but I’m all sandy with writing criticism, & must be off to my book again.” (D2: 245-246)

Façade involves one or more narrators speaking the words of Sitwell’s poems to Walton’s music in a sort of sing-song whose rhythm is carefully noted on its own stave in the score. The words are, in effect, drowned by the music, thus playing a musical rather than a literary role. Whereas the style of the poems is still a far cry from the sound poetry of the Dadaist poets, they are nevertheless nonsense poems as the following example from Sitwell’s ‘Hornpipe’ shows (see Figure 26):

30 For a description of the first performance of Facade, see also http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/works/walton/facade.html.
In literature as such, at its most extreme therefore, it would seem that writing “musically” is to be equated with a departure from linguistic meaning, words as such becoming “music” - witness the following lines taken from the Siren’s passage in

---

Joyce's *Ulysses*, a text which has been studied again and again for its innovative "musical" style:32

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing.
Imperthnthn thnthnthn.
Chips, picking chips off rocky thumbnail, chips.
Horrid! And gold flushed more.33

But these lines show that the less the language of the story seems to mean, the more absurd it tends to become as language, but interestingly, not as music since the language becomes music. Very often, Virginia Woolf will thus parody what Steven Paul Scher categorizes as “word music”,34 in order to highlight its absurdity within the context of the novel. Virginia Woolf, in the 'Present Day' chapter of *The Years*, will bring to life such a musicalization of words as the caretaker's two children will be asked at a party to sing a song. The audience is left bewildered as neither the tune nor the words seem to make any sense in a performance of a text, very similar in style to Hugo Ball's sound poetry:

"Now—sing a song for sixpence!" he said.
"Yes. Weren't you taught something at school?" Peggy asked.
They stared at her but remained silent. They had stopped eating. They were a centre of a little group. They swept their eyes over the grown-up people for a moment, then, each giving the other a little nudge, they burst into song:

Etho passo tanno hai,
Fai donk to tu do,
Mai to, kai to, lai to see
Toh dom to tuh do -

That was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognisable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune. They stopped.
They stood with their hands behind their backs. Then with one impulse they attacked the next verse:

34 Steven Paul Scher, 'How meaningful is 'Musical' in Literary Criticism?' (1972), in Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf (eds.), *op.cit.*, p.45.
Fanno to par, etto to mar,  
Timin tudo, tido,  
Foll to gar in, mitno to par,  
Eido, teido, meido -  
They sang the second verse more fiercely than the first. The rhythm seemed to rock and the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. The grown-up people did not know whether to laugh or to cry. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous.  
They burst out again:  
Chree to gay ei,  
Geeray didax . . .  
Then they stopped. It seemed to be in the middle of a verse. They stood there grinning, silent, looking at the floor. Nobody knew what to say. There was something horrible in the noise they made. It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless. (Y, 463-464)

Both in the Siren’s passage of *Ulysses*, and the children’s song in *The Years*, Joyce and Woolf do not shift backwards and forwards from narrative prose to a musicalization of prose, but rather shift from language to music - a type of music which relies on vocalized speech rather than musical sounds as such,35 but music nonetheless if we characterize music foremost by its unreferentiality and its focus on the acoustic aspect of language. What Woolf highlights in the above passage from *The Years* is the absurdity of considering language as music in what are, after all, literary works.

(ii) The musical effect in prose: from words to sentences to whole pages at a time

Whereas it is undeniable that Virginia Woolf drew some musical techniques from poetry to reinforce the power of specific passages36 as she was attracted to the sounds of words,37 she clearly made a difference between a “musicality” of the

---

37 See her humorous “analysis” of the sounds of the name “Vanessa” in a letter to Clive Bell:
language, which may be deployed at a local level to enhance certain punctual
effects, and a more essential "musical" conception of literature which goes beyond
technical prowess. The more discerning critics have pointed out the misleading nature
of the traditional musico-literary plane, that of the poetical musicality of language,
which has dominated literature and literary critique for many years. It is quite
remarkable that most often than not, the Modernist novelist's interest in music is
unquestionably put in the same bag, so to speak, as the type of musicality usually
associated with Symbolist poetry, leading Werner Wolf to write,

among the relationships between literature and other media or arts the link with music
is especially old. This, however, does not apply to the same degree to the relation
between music and narrative literature and in particular to the [...] musicalized fiction.
[...] The musicalness of poetry has frequently been emphasized in aesthetic theory [...] 
but can a novel be considered a symphony, or can pages of fiction sound like a fugue?

In Woolf's case in particular, Peter Jacobs has pointed out that

the basic lyrical qualities of Virginia Woolf's work tempt us to make statements on the
melodiousness and the rhythm of her language, but that is only a minor part of the
musico-literary research.

The danger of looking at the way the rhythms and sonorities of Woolf's style achieve
a musical effect is not only to put what she considered was the most superficial aspect
of language into the foreground, but it is also to see Woolf's novels rather short-

First, I think, to Vanessa; and I am almost inclined to let her name stand alone upon the page. It
contains all the beauty of the sky, and the melancholy of the sea, and the laughter of the Dolphins in
its circumference, first in the mystic Van, spread like a mirror of grey glass to Heaven, Next in the
swishing tail of its successive esses, and finally in the grave pause and suspension of the ultimate, a
breathing of peace like the respiration of Earth itself. (L1: 282)

Cf. also her analysis of other potential names for Vanessa's daughter (later called Angelica):
Paula is a name of character, and so is Susanna; and I see one must consider Bell as part of the colour
scheme, though, if she marries a man called Tristram or McCawney it will be sad to have sacrificed
Sidonia, Esther, Vashii and the others. I like a name that has the look of a clear green wave; there's
distinct emerald in Sidonia, just as there's the splash of the sea in Vanessa; and a chandelier or lustre
in Miriam, with all its eyes. By the way, Leonard wants you to call her Fuchsia; that is his favourite
name, and he long ago decided to call his daughter that. (L2: 330)

38 Effects which may be "poetical" but also primarily humorous such as the play on words "soul/sole" in
Between the Acts (BA, 21).
39 Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A study in the Theory and History of Intermediality,
op.cit., p. 3; see also Eric Prieto, Listening in: Music, Mind, and the Modernist Narrative, op.cit., p. ix-
x.
40 Peter Jacobs, op.cit., p. 246.
sightedly, at such a close distance that the analysis fails to grasp the effect of the novel as a whole, whose sheer length make it difficult to compare to the expressive modalities of a poem, blind to its impetus and structure in an analysis of details.\footnote{This is why Jean-Michel Rabaté, in an analysis of the Sirens episode from which we quoted above, highlights the fact that critics have in reality been misled by the musicality of the sonic plasticity of words, which, however undeniably a feature of the text, has on the contrary obscured a more profound musicality which lies beneath the surface glitter of the words in the interplay of meanings: “the puns and tropes all tend to assert the imitative quality of the language — but not in the sense that they attempt to imitate formal music”, cf. Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘The Silence of the Sirens’, in Maurice Beja (ed). \textit{James Joyce, The Centennial Symposium}, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 85.} As Woolf will argue,

the illusion of fiction is gradual; its effects are prepared. [...] Our being for the moment is centred and constricted, as in any violent shock of personal emotion. Afterwards, it is true, the sensation begins to spread in wider rings through our minds; remoter senses are reached; these begin to sound and to comment and we are aware of echoes and reflections. \textit{(CE2: 6-7)}

Rather than equating on a superficial level the “musicality” of language with its acoustic properties, Virginia Woolf will instead compare the principles of the musical idiom, i.e. an art based on the combinations or associations of tones, with the principles of linguistic expression, i.e. words that are combined into making phrases and paragraphs:

In the old days, of course, when English was a new language, writers could invent new words and use them. Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words — they spring to the lips whenever we see a new sight or feel a new sensation - but we cannot use them because the language is old. You cannot use a brand new word in an old language because of the very obvious yet mysterious fact that a word is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. It is not a word indeed until it is part of a sentence. Words belong to each other, although, of course, only a great writer knows that the word “incarnadine” belongs to “multitudinous seas.” To combine new words with old words is fatal to the constitution of the sentence. In order to use new words properly you would have to invent a new language; and that, though no doubt we shall come to it, is not at the moment our business. Our business is to see what we can do with the English language as it is. How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth? That is the question.
[...] Nor do they like being lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately. They hang together, in sentences, in paragraphs, sometimes for whole pages at a time. ('Craftsmanship', CE2: 249-250)

Interestingly, Virginia Woolf will thus draw analogies between the effect of the combinations of words in many of her novels to the never-ending (musical) melodies of peals of bells. In The Years, “the bells were making their usual commotion. [...] Just as one stopped, here was another beginning. They went walloping one over another, one after another, as if they would never be finished” (Y, 65). In Between the Acts, “the words were like the first peal of a chime of bells. As the first peals, you hear the second; as the second peals, you hear the third” (BA, 29) and as “the church bells always stopped, leave you to ask: Won’t there be another note? Isa, half-way across the lawn, listened. . . . Ding, dong, ding . . . There was not going to be another note” (BA, 242). In such a way, for Woolf, the musicalization of fiction lies in the combinations of words, in the harmonization of their meanings and not in the “wild music” of “those resonances and lovely echoes that break and chime from nerve to nerve in our breasts, making [...] false phrases” (W, 209), to quote Bernard again. What Virginia Woolf means by “rhythm” has therefore very little to do with the beat of the line or the scansion of the phrase. When used in artful combinations, words are most likely to achieve one of those “swift marriages” of meanings, as she will term it in her essay on ‘Walter Sickert’, comparing the effect to that of a musical chord in which several tones combine to create a complex auditory texture:

The novelist after all wants to make us see. Gardens, rivers, skies, clouds changing, the colour of a woman’s dress, landscapes that bask beneath lovers, twisted woods that people walk in when they quarrel – novels are full of pictures like these. [...] And he must often think that to describe a scene is the worst way to show it. It must be done with one word, or with one word in skilful contrast with another. For example, there is Shakespeare’s ‘Dear as the ruddy drops that visit this sad heart.’ Does not ‘ruddy’ shine out partly because ‘sad’ comes after it; does not ‘sad’ convey to us a double sense of the gloom of the mind and the dullness of colour? They both speak at once, striking two notes to make one chord, stimulating the eye of the mind and of the body. ('Walter Sickert', CE2: 241, my italics)
Virginia Woolf takes this art of weighing and combining words very seriously, as she comments on the "dangerous" nature of prose-writing, "where one slip means death", as the effect is one which affects the novel as a whole: the whole edifice of the novel could thus collapse from a miscalculated or loose composition. Speaking for instance of Jane Austen's *Emma*, she will indeed note that

there comes a moment -- 'I will dance with you,' says Emma -- which rises higher than the rest, which, though not eloquent in itself, or violent, or made striking by the beauty of language, has the whole weight of the book behind it. In Jane Austen, too, we have the same sense, though the ligatures are much less tight, that her figures are bound, and restricted to a few definite movements. She, too, in her modest everyday prose, chose the dangerous art where one slip means death. ('On not knowing Greek', CE1: 3)

We know from Woolf's friend and fellow writer Gerald Brenan that Virginia Woolf was so interested in Beethoven during the years in which she was writing *The Waves* that she read a biography of his life to try to understand not only his personality but more importantly, his process of composition, envying in particular "his power of drawing up into his score by constant revision and correction themes which resisted being brought to the surface".42 Perhaps recalling Woolf's own thoughts on Beethoven at that time, Leonard Woolf will also himself compare her method of writing to Beethoven's method of composition, the fact that she would quickly jot down her impressions in her diary and notebooks for later use and development, and the constant re-evaluating and re-writing of her novels:

In *A Writer's Diary* I published extracts from Virginia's diary which show her engrossed in the day-to-day work of writing these books. She uses these pages as

Beethoven used his Notebooks to jot down an idea or partially work out a theme to be used months or years later in a novel or a symphony.\footnote{43 Leonard Woolf, \textit{Downhill all the Way}, op.cit., p. 148.}

Speaking about D.H. Lawrence for instance, Woolf reflects on how she dislikes the weakness of his “strumming with two fingers” when “after all, English has one million words: why confine yourself to 6? & praise yourself for so doing” (\textit{D4}: 126). She will thus stress the importance of the musical function of her diary-writing in particular, which she found “has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures” (\textit{D2}: 320). More than just providing background information, Woolf’s conception of her drafts, diaries and letters is central for understanding her thoughts on the relation between music and literature, revealing how over and over again, throughout her life, she has recourse to musical analogies when speaking about writing in general. In such a way, she will say that

\begin{quote}
it strikes me that in this book I \textit{practise} writing; do my scales; yes & work at certain effects. I daresay I practised Jacob here ; - & Mrs. D & shall invent my next book here; for here I write merely in the spirit - great fun it is too, & Old V. of 1940 will see something in it too. (\textit{D2}: 319-320)
\end{quote}

Virginia Woolf thus often describes the scraps and fragments of her diary sketches and the preliminary drafts of novels as the improvised chords and tunes produced on a piano. By practising such “finger exercises” and “scales” and improvising small literary sketches, she is in fact, preparing the ground for longer works of fiction:

\begin{quote}
Scraps, orts and fragments, as I said in \textit{P.H. [Pointz Hall, original title of Between the Acts]}, which is now bubbling. I'm playing with words: and think I owe some dexterity to finger exercises here. (\textit{D5}: 290)
\end{quote}

An important aspect of what Woolf considers to be the relation between literature and music can thus be inferred by the fact that she puts in parallel what could potentially be understood as the simple metaphorical image of the improviser searching for chords, harmonies and tunes, with her more fundamental conception of the relation between her diary writing and a certain musical conception of the style and form of
her fictional writing, thus showing how a musical model enables her to go beyond the transitory nature of the inconclusive improvisation of her diary sketches, to achieve, as we shall see below, a full-scale composition, by resorting to an underlying musical design in her novels. As she will comment to herself whilst she was writing To the Lighthouse, her literary improvisations are not always satisfactory, because they lack, as we shall see, the unity of the overarching formal characteristics of full-scale musical compositions which model her conception of her own full-scale novelistic writing:

My summer's wanderings with the pen have I think shown me one or two new dodges for catching my flies. I have sat here, like an improviser with his hands rambling over the piano. The result is perfectly inconclusive and almost illiterate. I want to learn greater quiet and force. (D3: 37)

Considering Woolf's concern with finding a satisfactory overall structuring principle for The Waves, as we have seen above, it certainly seems that her recourse to a musical model during her conception and writing of this novel was to be foremost a formal device which would affect the overall shape of the narrative. In the midst of writing Mrs Dalloway, Woolf indeed noted on re-reading parts of her diary that "I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here" (D2: 321). Concerning Roger Fry's biography, music, as we have already mentioned in our first Chapter, was a way to override the mass of details and create a logical and unified whole of his life. This was a problem she had had from the start of her career: when speaking of her first novel, The Voyage Out, Woolf had admitted that even she had got lost in the details of her novel, struggling to keep a hold on the conception of the whole. Lytton Strachey had indeed written to Virginia Woolf that

my one criticism is about the conception of it as a whole— which I am doubtful about. As I read I felt that it perhaps lacked the cohesion of a dominating idea— I don’t mean in the spirit— but in the action. I wonder if you at all agree about this— but it is

44 Speaking of her friend and fellow novelist E.M. Forster, she describes in a similar manner the connection between the musical process of composition and the process of writing novels: “He is in trouble with a novel of his own, fingering the keys but only producing discords so far” (D1: 311).
difficult to explain in writing. There seemed such an enormous quantity of things in it that I couldn't help wanting still more. At the end I felt as if it was really only the beginning of an enormous novel, which had been— almost accidentally— cut short by the death of Rachel.\(^45\)

Woolf will reply:

I suspect your criticism about the failure of conception is quite right. I think I had a conception, but I don't think it made itself felt. What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again - and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled. The difficulty was to keep any sort of coherence, - also to give enough detail to make the characters interesting - which Forster says I didn't do. I really wanted three volumes. Do you think it is impossible to get this sort of effect in a novel; - is the result bound to be too scattered to be intelligible? I expect one may learn to get more control in time. One gets too much involved in details. (L2: 82)

Virginia Woolf's thoughts on the musicality of the micro-level \textit{versus} the macro-level in prose are dictated to her by her understanding of the art of reading itself. In her essay, 'How should one read a book?', Woolf gives us an insight into how the form of the whole novel takes shape in the mind of the reader:

What kind of book is it? How good a book is it? The friction of reading and the emotion of reading beat up too much dust to let us find clear answers to these questions. If we are asked our opinion, we cannot give it. Parts of the book seem to have sunk away, others to be starting out in undue prominence. Then perhaps it is better to take up some different pursuit – to walk, to talk, to dig, to listen to music. The book upon which we have spent so much time and thought fades entirely out of sight. But suddenly, as one is picking a snail from a rose, tying a shoe, perhaps, doing something distant and different, the whole book floats to the top of the mind complete. Some process seems to have been finished without one's being aware of it. The different details which have accumulated in reading assemble themselves in their proper places. The book takes on a

---

definite shape; it becomes a castle, a cowshed, a gothic ruin, as the case may be. Now one can think of the book as a whole, and the book as a whole is different, and gives one a different emotion, from the book received currently in several different parts. Its symmetry and proportion, its confusion and distortion can cause great delight or great disgust apart from the pleasure given by each detail as it is separately realised. Holding this complete shape in mind it now becomes necessary to arrive at some opinion of the book's merits, for though it is possible to receive the greatest pleasure and excitement from the first process, the actual reading, though this is of the utmost importance, it is not so profound or so lasting as the pleasure we get when the second process – the after reading – is finished, and we hold the book clear, secure, and (to the best of our powers) complete in our minds. (‘How Should One Read a Book’, CE2: 8)

Interestingly, the shape of the novel does not appear until one has reached the end of the book: “when the intoxication of rhythm has died down and the splendour of words has faded”, only then “a visionary shape will return to us” (CE2: 9), only then is the novel valuable, worthwhile and enduring and music, in particular its purely formal qualities, gives her the model for this overarching shaping of the novel as a whole, as we shall investigate in more detail below, taking Mrs Dalloway and The Waves as case studies.

b. The novel as composition, the problem of large-scale musicalization: two case-studies

(i) The contrapuntal style of Mrs Dalloway

- A musical conception?

From the critic’s point of view, one of the major problems associated with the type of macro-level musicality we outlined above is that of highlighting “musical” effects which are achieved over several pages. It is indeed very difficult to extract relevant passages and illustrations from the novels as these only fully make sense within their larger-scale context, usually in relation to many other sections. This is particularly apparent in anthologies of prose literature in which feature characteristic
“passages” from literary texts, something which Woolf will describe as a futile and even misleading exercise as it does not reflect on the merits of the novel as a whole. She will thus reflect on her essay on Pearsall Smith’s *A Treasury of English Prose* (published in 1919) that

we must not go to [the novelists] for perfect passages, descriptions, perorations, reflections so highly wrought that they can stand alone without their context. We must go to them for chapters, not for sentences; for beauty, not tranquil and contained, but wild and fleeting like the light on rough waters. (*E3*: 174)

Speaking of De Quincey’s style, for instance, Virginia Woolf will note the difficulty of analysing the “compound of suggestions” whose overall effect she describes as that of a musical composition:

If we try to analyse our sensations we shall find that we are worked upon as if by music. [...] the effect of repetitions and consonances and assonances – all this was part of the duty of a writer who wishes to put a complex meaning fully and completely before his reader. [...] But all these measures are diluted to a lower degree of strength and their force is spread over a much greater space, so that the transition from the lowest compass to the highest is by a gradation of shallow steps and we reach the utmost heights without violence. Hence the difficulty of stressing the particular quality of any single line as in a poem and the futility of taking one passage apart from the context, since its effect is compound of suggestions that have been received sometimes several pages earlier. (*CE4*: 2-3)

That Virginia Woolf contrived to create such a musical effect was clearly in her mind when she was writing *Mrs Dalloway*. Always concerned about the endings of her novels, as we have briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, we know from Woolf’s diary that the closing section of the novel was carefully thought out in order to create, in the party-scene, a sense of slow gradation which was fundamentally derived from music. To quote this passage again from Woolf’s diary:

There I am now – at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, & climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated spirited solid piece, knitting together everything & ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to
sum up Clarissa. Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, & Sally Seton perhaps: but
I don’t want to tie myself down to that yet. Now I do think this might be the best of my
endings, & come off, perhaps. \((D2: 312, \text{my italics})\)

Far from tying herself down to her original plan, the final version of the scene in
question bears very little resemblance to the outline she had made previous to writing
it. The party does not begin in the kitchen, nor do Peter, Richard and Sally Seton sum
up Clarissa on their way up the stairs, even though they will do so during the course
of the party itself. Nevertheless, though the actual details of the scene may have
changed, the musical model would appear to have still been in Woolf’s mind – it
cannot be put down to chance that a composer, J.S. Bach, is mentioned precisely at
that moment:

She said she loved Bach. So did Hutton. That was the bond between them, and Hutton
(a very bad poet) always felt that Mrs. Dalloway was far the best of the great ladies who
took an interest in art. It was odd how strict she was. About music she was purely
impersonal. She was rather a prig. But how charming to look at! She made her house so
nice if it weren’t for her Professors. Clarissa had half a mind to snatch him off and set
him down at the piano in the back room. For he played divinely.

“But the noise!” she said. “The noise!” \((D, 194)\)

To what extent could the baroque model have informed Woolf’s musicalization of
Mrs Dalloway? Though references in literary criticism to literary fugues are usually
particularly problematical and controversial, it remains to be asked whether the sort of
musical effect which Woolf was thinking of could indeed have been derived from the
contrapuntal music of Bach, in particular if we are to consider that Woolf was after a
staggered effect, each “note” summing up Clarissa being sounded on a different level
(cf. “at different stages of the staircase”) by a different person, with the suggestion
therein of a polyphonic texture.

- The flight of the musical fugue

We do not have the space to go into the various ways interdisciplinary critics
have sought to map the musical features of the fugue into literary works. Very often,
the shortcomings of their studies outweigh the benefits and their endeavours are
thwarted or remain unsatisfactorily metaphorical by the simple fact that the simultaneity which defines true “counterpoint” is particularly difficult to achieve in literature though, as we have seen above, the point is certainly debatable. What we wish to show in the following analysis is the way Woolf was interested not in borrowing the actual techniques of the fugue but rather creating through a novel handling of the expressive modalities of her own art, the effects achieved in music, effects which, as we shall see below, are characteristic of the fugue in particular. A few words of caution concerning the nature of the “fugue” are however in order before we proceed with our actual study. As Paul Walker has noted:

Despite the prominence of fugue in the history of Western art music and its virtually continuous cultivation in one form or another from the late Middle Ages until today, there exists no widespread agreement among present-day scholars on what its defining characteristics should be.46

Walker will continue by noting that, “if all pieces called fugue were collected together and compared, no single common defining characteristic would be discovered beyond that of imitation in the broadest sense”.47 It cannot be denied that the major melopoetic approaches to literary fugues focus primarily on formal parallels between the musical genre and its literary counterpart48 but as Walker argues, “formal structure is not in the end a defining characteristic of fugue”.49

As a result, there has been prolonged argument about whether fugue is a form at all (and, by extension, whether it is a genre) as well as whether any particular formal model should be considered necessary (most often recommended in this context is a ternary model vaguely reminiscent of sonata form; see Dreyfus, 1993).50

47 ibid.
50 ibid.
For these reasons, rather than reading into Woolf’s text what will necessarily be our own one-sided, simplistic and controversial understanding of the nebulous nature of the “fugue”, we shall endeavour to account for the originality of Woolf’s narrative by referring to certain overall traits which we perceive are characteristic of a contrapuntal idiom. We shall not be positing that Mrs Dalloway is a fugue in the formal sense, nor shall we be studying at this point the way Virginia Woolf may have played with counterpointed voicing. As we do not have the space here to go into any great detail, we shall simply give some directions for what would appear to be a very promising study by focusing exclusively on how the staggered counterpoint of the exposition of the fugue may have been a model for Woolf’s handling of her narrative from the very start of the novel by focusing on the opening of Mrs Dalloway, in which Woolf visibly attempted to create the sort of gradated effect she so admired in De Quincey’s musical style.

The etymology of the word “fugue” is often overlooked in technical analyses of the genre or it is considered a minor and sometimes merely colourful detail, but in our particular case, it is especially instructive. As Walker asserts, the word itself was 

a term in continuous use among musicians since the 14th century, when it was introduced, along with its vernacular equivalents chace and caccia, to designate a piece of music based on canonic imitation (i.e. one voice ‘chasing’ another; the Latin fuga is related to both fugere: ‘to flee’ and fugare: ‘to chase’). Like ‘canon’, fugue has served since that time both as a genre designation for a piece of music and as the name of a compositional technique to be introduced into a piece of music.51

If anything, it could be said that the one overarching characteristic of the otherwise multifaceted fugal style comes from its very etymology, i.e. the expression of flight, the effect of which being that of a continuous chasing of voices as one takes over from another in “mid-flight”, so to speak: before we have had time to hear one voice through to the end of its melodic phrase, another has already taken over, and another, and another in what could be described metaphorically as a never-ending tumbling of voices and phrases... Without this tumbling of voices, a fugue would not be a fugue and it is on this aspect that we shall be focusing in our study. Harmonically, as we

51 Paul Walker, op.cit., § 2.1.
shall see, the result is very interesting, as few strong cadential closures are blurred or repeatedly delayed by the fluid counterpointed style of writing. Though delaying the cadence is a feature of much Western classical music, the effect in a fugue is particularly apparent and could be said to be one of the underlying motivations of the canonic style in general. As Walker notes, “the independence and integrity of each [voice] are strictly maintained until the last two bars, when chords are introduced to lend fullness and finality”. This is easily heard when listening to the opening of Bach’s first fugue in C major from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I (BWV 846), for four voices (see Figure 27), which we shall take as musical illustration in this particular study.

Figure 27. J.S. Bach, fugue in C major, BWV 846, bars. 1-9

As always in a fugue, the voices enter in a gradated manner. In this case, the alto voice begins the piece by stating the “subject” (see Figure 28 below), but both the soprano and the tenor voice (in bars 2 and 4 respectively) will enter well before the melodic phrase of the alto has reached its conclusion, i.e. the middle C on the third beat of bar 4. From the third beat of the second bar, the alto’s melodic line is conventionally described as the “countersubject” even though it is in fact a continuation of the same melodic phrase.

---

52 Ibid.
53 Downloaded from http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/abt8726/index.html.
In a similar manner, the tenor voice will itself cut through the melodic phrase of the soprano voice, which, up to then, is called “answer” (rather than “subject”) as it presents the subject in the dominant key rather than the tonic, and from that point on, as in the case of the alto voice, becomes the second “countersubject”, though again, both answer and countersubject span the one melodic phrase. In bar 5, the bass will finally enter and state the subject in the tonic key while the tenor continues with a third countersubject and alto and soprano play on (see Figure 29). Our attention is therefore constantly drawn to each new voice as it enters into the polyphonic texture of the fugue.

Our expectations of a cadential harmonic resolution are also constantly thwarted by the polyphonic style of the piece. If we were to play the alto’s first melodic phrase on its own, it clearly starts in C major, moves from the tonic (the first note, C, of the phrase) towards the dominant G in the second bar which becomes itself the tonic in

---

54 For a simple interactive analysis of this fugue, see José Rodríguez Alvira, ‘Analysis of Bach’s fugue BWV 846 in C major (WTC I)’, online http://www.teoria.com/articulos/analysis/BWV846/index.htm.
bar three since we have modulated into G major after the entry of the soprano line on the G (bar 2). In bar 4 however, the F in the alto voice is naturalized and technically, when played alone, this voice has from that point on, modulated back into C major, therefore finishing its harmonic progression on the tonic C (bar 4), giving us overall a typical I-V-I progression in which the G acts as a central pivot, either as dominant (V) in C major or tonic (I) in G major. The pattern could be schematized as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bar numbers</th>
<th>bar 1</th>
<th>bar 2</th>
<th>bar 3</th>
<th>bar 4</th>
<th>bar 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTO VOICE</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keys</td>
<td>C Major</td>
<td>C Major → G Major → C Major</td>
<td>C Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pivotal notes</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, as we noted above, the soprano’s voice, having come in in bar 2 in the dominant key of G major, is, in bar 4, still playing in G (cf. the F sharp leading to the tonic G in the third and fourth beats of bar 4). If we put alto and soprano back together again, it is difficult, in bar 4, to know whether we are still in G (i.e. according to the soprano line), or whether we are back in C (i.e. following the alto line). The same harmonic ambivalence occurs in bars 5-6 after the entry of the tenor voice. Bach is clearly not deliberately composing the sort of bitonal music Stravinsky would favour. This blurring of the harmonic progression is created solely by the polyphonic texture, the staggered entries of the voices and the resulting delayed modulations and shared pivotal notes (cf. the C in the tenor line bar 6 is the dominant of F Major, but for the alto and soprano lines, is the tonic of C) which means that whereas we are clearly in C major in bar 1, modulating to G major in bars 2 and 3, we expect in bar 4 either to be back in C if we were following the alto line, thus hearing a concluding C major cadence at the end of the alto’s phrase, or to be in G, having listened to the soprano’s entry, in which case the soprano’s phrase concludes very satisfactorily on the tonic note G. The effect of the cadence in C (led on by the alto voice) in bar 4 gets thwarted by the soprano’s modulation into G and the final assertion of the key of G in bar 4. This is further complicated by the entry in G by the tenor voice which however will briefly go into F major in bars 5 and 6, thus further destabilizing our harmonic expectations, leading us progressively, phrase by phrase, further and further away from the expected C major cadence (for a breakdown of the harmonic progression, see Figure 30).
Metaphorically, this effect, when heard, could be described as a series of staggered waves of sound, each wave being chased by another whilst the sonic texture progressively gets more dense, the (harmonic) stability being constantly undermined. These are the very etymological principles of the fugue, as we outlined above.

In the opening of *Mrs Dalloway*, the effect is very much the same as that which we have just described as each scene gives way to the next in a very characteristic motion. In practise however, establishing close parallels would be not
only difficult since the passage under scrutiny in the novel spans thirty pages or so, but it would also not be entirely satisfactory as we would necessarily end up by describing the text in musical terms. It is very easy, for instance, to slip from an analysis of the way Virginia Woolf builds up a tense atmosphere of fear, anger, and horror in purely literary or imaginative terms, to speaking of it in the pseudo-musical terms of concord, discord and modulation, simply for the sake of making clever musical parallels, thus falling headlong into the dreaded quicksands of impressionistic interdisciplinary scholarship. To avoid such danger, we shall simply make a few observations concerning the way the narrative progression of the opening scenes of *Mrs Dalloway* is handled by Woolf, from the moment Clarissa leaves the house to buy flowers, to the moment she returns home after having walked down Bond Street (cf. *Mrs D*, 5-33).

- **Mrs. Dalloway (scene one): Clarissa in Bond Street**

Interestingly, just as we were metaphorically speaking of “waves” in our analysis of the fugue, Clarissa’s action of leaving her house in the morning is described in terms of water as she crosses her threshold and metaphorically throws herself into the waves, to be buoyed out to sea:

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave. (*Mrs D*, 5)

The impressions of initial happiness, stillness and calm, are however immediately shattered: Peter Walsh, her old friend, “would be back from India one of these days” (*Mrs D*, 5) and this brings to her mind another day and time at Bourton when she had
gone out onto the terrace and met him for the first time, a “solemn” day in which she felt, like now,

as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, “Musing among the vegetables?”—was that it?—“I prefer men to cauliflowers”—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning. (Mrs D, 5)

An atmosphere of expectation is thus created from the start by introducing an ominous note, creating a sense of fear and instability. Peter Walsh's remarks, which also perturb and destroy the quiet contemplation of Clarissa in the garden, by their complete inadequacy and nonsense (“I prefer men to cauliflowers”). The instability is emphasized by the fact that Clarissa cannot remember the exact sentence Walsh uttered, emphasizing a degree of hesitation (“was that it?”). From then on, the tension of the scene will gradually increase expressed by the clash of Clarissa’s volatile and contradictory moods. On the one hand, Clarissa’s personality is an affirmation of life through a constant “jingle” (Mrs D, 6) of words and images, vision after vision, real, remembered or imagined, following each other in close succession with no apparent logic, all in one breath:

The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies, whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings
to tempt Americans (but one must economise, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth), and
she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since
her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very
night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. (*Mrs D*, 6)

Each long sentence thus enacts the very motions of a rising wave as it “sweeps its
coils in and out, [...] piles its summit higher and higher” (*CE4*: 3), as Woolf will say
of the (musical) style of De Quincey. On the other hand, Clarissa’s sense of happiness
and security remains superficial and will be undermined by her profound insecurity
and the need to be acknowledged and revered by her friends. Just as Peter Walsh had
made her lose her countenance by making off-key remarks as she was contemplating
the garden in Bourton, Hugh Whitbread, an old childhood friend whom she meets in
the park that morning, will make her feel particularly inadequate and self-conscious as
she felt “very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat. Not the right
hat for the early morning, was that it?” (*Mrs D*, 8). This negative self-consciousness
gradually transforms itself into despair and finally anger as each of her thoughts will
turn bitter, as she thinks of her friends past and present and to the party ahead: she is
worried about Peter Walsh’s imminent arrival and the state of their relationship (*Mrs
D*, 9-10); she is worried about the way people perceive her (“How much she wanted
it- that people should look pleased as she came in, Clarissa thought”, *Mrs D*, 12) to
the point of putting her life into question (“Oh if she could have had her life over
again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently”,
*Mrs D*, 13); and she is worried about the future of her daughter Elizabeth, who was at
that moment infatuated with another woman, Miss Kilman and who now even “went
to Communion” with her (*Mrs D*, 14). All these elements, and many others, will
finally contribute as a whole to affect the atmosphere of the scene. The compound of
all these thoughts, emotions, images and scenes, progressively gives the effect of an
escalation towards a point of saturation and climax, several pages later:

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs
cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the
soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be
stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel
scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in
friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful, rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred! (Mrs D, 15)

Clarissa is torn between being “content” and “secure”, feeling “pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful”, and this insidious dissatisfaction with her life and a growing “hatred” for the people who invade and upset the repose which her soul craves for. The image of a room or a house being invaded by “monsters” whose hooves break the twigs of the branches of her soul, is crucial in understanding Clarissa’s struggle, as the scene will finally be enacted and magnified in the last moments of the novel, at the party, itself an “invasion” of her house by multitudes of people, this final scene testing the strength of her will to live on. She will either vanquish and accept, or succumb and be annihilated, like Septimus, whose own “soul” was constantly being invaded by his inquisitive wife Rezia and the doctors: when Doctor Holmes tries to force his way into Septimus’ room, Septimus, incapable of accepting yet another invasion of his mind, escapes it in death by jumping out of the window.

Having thus reached a climax in the escalating compass of emotions, Clarissa enters the flower-shop: we are given a moment of respite, the moment of pause at the top of the “wave” as we expect it to suddenly rush down and break, the tension thus resolved. The beauty of the flowers, the “delicious scent” and “exquisite coolness” (Mrs D, 15) of the shop, combined with the simple-minded kindness of Miss Pym, who does not judge Clarissa nor invade her soul and even takes onto herself all the potential problems, worries and tension (the tire bursting in the street was “all her fault”, Mrs D, 16), will soothe Clarissa’s inner turmoil:

Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the wing doors of Mulberry’s the florists. [...] There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes - so she breathed in the earthy-garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh, like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and
prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale - as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies, was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower - roses, carnations, irises, lilac - glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when - oh! a pistol shot in the street outside! (Mrs D, 15-16)

This passage is very similar to the description Woolf gives of a passage in De Quincey’s Confessions, which could describe the flower-shop scene in Mrs Dalloway as well:

Our minds, thus widened and lulled to a width of apprehension, stand open to receive one by one in slow and stately procession the ideas which De Quincey wishes us to receive; the golden fullness of life; the pomps of the heaven above; the glory of the flowers below, as he stands “between an open window and a dead body on a summer's day”. The theme is supported and amplified and varied. The idea of hurry and trepidation, of reaching towards something that for ever flies, intensifies the impression of stillness and eternity. Bells heard on summer evenings, palm-trees waving, sad winds that blow for ever, keep us by successive waves of emotion in the same mood. The emotion is never stated; it is suggested and brought slowly by repeated images before us until it stays, in all its complexity, complete. (CE4: 2)

The description of the flower-shop, by emphasizing in slow motion the static state of the display, creates a moment of suspension as we enter a different world in which Clarissa finally finds peace. The quietness and harmony of this scene is amplified by the preceding rush and cacophony of the street outside. The sudden break into a slow quiet narrative has a powerful effect. The details of the flower-shop are, in the extract above, literally “extinguished” as we are shown a picture made out of abstract splashes of colour in a dark, mysterious, cool atmosphere. Even Clarissa herself
becomes one of the nodding flowers, “turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed” and is thus subtly blended into the background of flowers, and the flowers themselves turn into young girls outside among the flowers. The transition from image to image is very slow and subtle and imperceptibly, and in a sort of *mise en abyme*, we find ourselves before a completely different world, “as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer’s day” (*Mrs D*, 16). But this moment of epiphany and equilibrium is abruptly shattered by the sound of the “pistol shot” outside, and Clarissa’s cry “oh” is like a cry of sheer agony, the “monster” yet again crashing through her soul and waking her from her dream. The emotion at this point is heightened by the behaviour of Miss Pym, unaware of the turmoil inside Clarissa’s thoughts, who hears “oh” simply as a cry of surprise, and not of anguish, and who thus emphasizes the isolation of Clarissa. The break between the first and second episode is abrupt to the point of cutting the narrative mid-sentence. But more importantly, it leaves Clarissa’s plight hanging in the balance. In such a way, the wave of emotion which had centered on Clarissa’s increasing turmoil in this episode, has been carefully and gradually built up to this “moment of being”, a moment of suspense at the top of the “wave”, but as we are suddenly whisked away into a different scene altogether and completely lose sight of Clarissa, the wave will fail to break, thus avoiding a resolution.

- *Mrs. Dalloway* (scene two): the mysterious motor car

To consciously use a musical metaphor, the second scene has very much the same effect as that of a *subito piano* which follows a *fortissimo* climax in a piece of music. Far removed from the transcendent synaesthetic harmony of the flower-shop scene, the rhythm and motion of the bustling street in the next scene creates a strong contrast and plunges us back into the frenzied atmosphere of Clarissa’s walk through London, “the swing, tramp, and trudge; [...] the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; [...] the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead (*Mrs D*, 6). Very quickly however, this tempo slowly winds down

55 cf. chapter 4.
to a complete “standstill” (*Mrs D*, 17): the car, which caused the “shot” by backfiring has stopped at the curb and is having a strange hypnotizing effect on all the people in the street who, one after another, will pause to look at it. The rumours then start to spread – “nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales’s, the Queen’s, the Prime Minister’s? Whose face was it? Nobody knew” (*Mrs D*, 17):

rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson’s scent shop on the other, passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud’s sudden sobriety and stillness upon the faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly. (*Mrs D*, 17)

These rumours are progressively described in terms of a build-up in texture, becoming multiple and audible and as the car drives away, “the frail hum of the motor wheels [are returned] as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral” (*Mrs D*, 22). Significantly, as in the first scene, the effect of the departing car is compared to that of a wave slowly set in motion, gradually gaining speed and finally washing over the whole world to the very confines of China:

The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors’ shops on both sides of Bond Street. [...] Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional [...] For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound. (*Mrs D*, 20-21)

The transformation effected by the car on its environment is thus acted out within the sentences themselves: the gliding motion of the car and the effect of its wake is amplified and mirrored in the flow and rhythms of the sentences themselves, suggesting stylistically as well as metaphorically the gradual expansion of the wave. As in Clarissa’s walk to the flower shop, the scene is characterized by a motion of escalation towards a climax. Indeed, the interest of this scene comes from the way the
car acts as symbol of fame and power, in a progressive transition from the insignificant glimpse of a gloved hand behind a blind -

Passers-by, who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey. \textit{(Mrs D, 16-17)}

- to actual sightings of Royalty itself -

The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first time and last, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state. \textit{(Mrs D, 19)}

- to visions of heads of state gathering at Buckingham Palace -

Clarissa guessed; Clarissa knew of course; she had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name, - the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's? - which, by force of its own lustre, burnt its way through (Clarissa saw the car diminishing, disappearing), to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves, Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace. \textit{(Mrs D, 20)}

- and finally, in mounting concentric circles, allusions to England and the Empire:

in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. \textit{(Mrs D, 21)}

The more and more pressing question of who was in the car will however remain unanswered. At the moment of truth, the crowd gathered in front of Buckingham Palace, waiting for the car to come in and reveal its mysterious passenger, is distracted by the sound of a plane: all the eyes turn upwards and the car passes through the gates unnoticed, a mere parenthesis amidst the excitement of the new scene to come:
The car came on.

Suddenly Mrs Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Every one looked up.

Dropping dead down, the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps?

'Blaxo,' said Mrs Coates in a strained, awe-stricken voice, gazing straight up, and her baby, lying stiff and white in her arms, gazed straight up.

'Kreemo,' murmured Mrs Bletchley, like a sleep-walker. With his hat held out perfectly still in his hand, Mr Bowley gazed straight up. All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls.

The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater -

'That's an E,' said Mrs Bletchley -
or a dancer -

'It's toffee,' murmured Mr Bowley -

(and the car went in at the gates and nobody looked at it), and shutting off the smoke, away and away it rushed, and the smoke faded and assembled itself round the broad white shapes of the clouds. (Mrs D, 23-24)

The strength of this whole passage comes, as for the first scene, from the preparation and gradual build-up of a wave of tension towards a climax and the resulting suspense as our expectations of a resolution are dashed by the appearance of the plane and we never find out who was in the car.

• Mrs. Dalloway (scene three): the soaring aeroplane
The aeroplane, by tracing letters in the sky, diverted everybody's attention. Again, the metaphor of the “wave” dominates the scene. The wave-like motion of the plane is indeed unmistakable. The plane, like a bird skimming the waves (cf. references to seagulls, Mrs D, 24), is described in terms of soaring, swooping and circling as it traces smoke letters in the sky, the words traced higher up in the sky each time round. The crowd, forgetting all about the car, endeavours from then on to decipher the words made up by these smoke letters. The aeroplane's scene is based on repetition of a sequence or pattern, i.e. the letters traced on the sky, which is never completed. We shall never know what word was traced by the plane. Until the end, the search for a meaning, the wait for new letters which may give the “key”, or, as the plane traces, the KEY (cf. “the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps?”, Mrs D, 24) to the syllables traced on the sky, creates a sense of anticipation and of mounting tension. But just as the plane soars higher and higher, just as it starts writing the first three letters TOF, just as we expect the revelation of what the plane is writing - even though the word in itself is of no importance whatsoever (is it advertising a make of toffee? cf. Mrs D, 24-25) -, the machine soars to yet another higher plane, until it becomes transformed into a “disembodied” symbol of pure transcendence:

Away and away the aeroplane shot, till it was nothing but a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein, speculation mathematics, the Mendelian theory - away the aeroplane shot. (Mrs D, 32)

At that same moment, a man on his way into St Paul’s cathedral, there to seek shelter and “truth”, pauses on the threshold and beholds the plane in the sky. Hoping for a revelation of some order, he focuses on the plane which may give him an indication of a higher truth which would transcend even that which the church may provide:

Then, while a seedy-looking nondescript man carrying a leather bag stood on the steps of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and hesitated, for within was what balm, how great a welcome, how many tombs with banners waving over them, tokens of victories not over armies,
but over, he thought, that plaguy spirit of truth seeking which leaves me at present without a situation, and more than that, the cathedral offers company, he thought, invites you to membership of a society; great men belong to it; martyrs have died for it; why not enter in, he thought, put this leather bag stuffed with pamphlets before an altar, a cross, the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly—why not enter in? he thought and while he hesitated out flew the aeroplane over Ludgate Circus. (Mrs D, 32)

The wave of expectation thus builds up to an even greater compass, and dramatically, at the very summit of the wave, silence suddenly descends upon London, as the plane flying ever more higher into the ether, soaring effortlessly in the atmosphere, traces yet again the first three letters on the blue canvas of the sky, a T, an O and an F:

It was strange; it was still. Not a sound was to be heard above the traffic. Unguided it seemed; sped of its own free will. And now, curving up and up, straight up, like something mounting in ecstasy, in pure delight, out from behind poured white smoke looping, writing a T, and O, an F. (Mrs D, 33)

This epiphanic moment is however abruptly shattered as the focus suddenly shifts at that point to Mrs Dalloway as she enters her house, totally unaware of the drama going on in the sky ("What are they looking at?", she will wonder, Mrs D, 33), as all the passers-by are staring at the sky.

Of the three narrative "waves" which form the opening of the novel, this moment reaches the highest point and it could be said, that all three scenes are themselves stages in a rising wave. As Woolf once said of De Quincey’s own musical narrative,

for page after page we are in company with a cultivated gentleman who describes with charm and eloquence what he has seen and known - the stage coaches, the Irish rebellion, the appearance and conversation of George the Third. Then suddenly the smooth narrative parts asunder, arch opens beyond arch, the vision of something for ever flying, for ever escaping, is revealed, and time stands still” (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4: 7).
If a fugue could be said to give an effect of "flight" or "fleeing" by the staggered voicing and the continuous modulations which thwart our expectations of cadence, similarly, the effect of "flight" is achieved in Mrs Dalloway, though by purely stylistic, imaginative and metaphorical means. In these pages, it could however be said that we are truly "worked upon as if by music" (‘De Quincey’s Autobiography’, CE4: 2). In such a way, though one-to-one correspondences between the fugue and the novel are most definitely out of the question, we would argue nevertheless that music, and the fugue in particular, was a model in Woolf’s novel.

The way each scene gives way to the next in the novel creates the same effect as that of the staggered entries in a fugue, in which the sense of stability and “closure” is constantly thwarted. Only in the final scene, the party, will the metaphorical waves set in motion at the start of the novel finally break, prefiguring the very last phrase of another of Woolf’s novels, The Waves: “the waves broke on the shore” (W, 211). Similarly, the ending of Mrs Dalloway is particularly conclusive: “For there she was.” (Mrs D, 213) will remark Peter Walsh on seeing Clarissa, whole and entire. Though we do not have the scope to go at this point into an analysis of the party-scene, a study of the effect of the summing-up on “three notes” which Woolf had projected for these pages (D2: 312), would show that it mirrors the effect of the ending of a fugue in which the harmony finally moves back towards a final concluding cadence, as each wave of sound finally breaks and resolves, as each voice finally answers the unanswered question which it had asked over and over again, in a way that

a satisfaction, or whatever one may call that sense of answer which the finest art supplies to its own question, is constantly conveyed (E1: 290).

It is this “sense of answer” which the fugue best expresses, a satisfaction given by the fact that all has finally be resolved and has drawn to a stable close, thereby achieving the highest sense of overarching unity.

(ii) From orchestration and thematic transformation to sonata-form in The Waves
Our study of *Mrs Dalloway* exemplified the way we may investigate the musicalization of fiction through the bias of overarching aesthetic principles which create a bridge between the musical fugue and the literary fugue, rather than trying to give controversial direct one-to-one correspondences. Not only is the effect of the fugue particularly tricky to achieve in literature, leading to strong stylistic and imaginative constraints, as we have shown above, but it is also one of the most covert forms of musical borrowings: the link to music in *Mrs Dalloway* was far from being explicit, its effect being achieved through purely literary means, and our reading was more of an inference than a direct proof of an attempted musicalization. In *The Waves* however, the problem of “unity” is both thematized and enacted in musical terms in the novel itself. We shall briefly study the question as it brings into play the two other fundamental aspects of the symphonic paradigm we outlined in our diagram (cf. Figure 23): another musical form, the sonata-form, in relation to a compositional method, that of thematic transformation.

The quest for the perfect work of art pervades *The Waves* and will become intimately linked with the musical paradigm. The question of artistic unity is thematized in the novel, revolving round the character of Bernard who constantly invents phrases of high emotional and poetical content which he describes as “bubbles” which never burst, since they are perfect miniatures, but which are disconnected from each other and thus fragmented. That Bernard’s phrases remain thus forever disconnected and his stories unfinished, is one of the greatest tragedies of his life:

‘But Bernard goes on talking. Up they bubble—images. “Like a camel,” . . . “a vulture.” The camel is a vulture; the vulture a camel; for Bernard is a dangling wire, loose, but seductive. Yes, for when he talks, when he makes his foolish comparisons, a lightness comes over one. One floats, too, as if one were that bubble; one is freed; I have escaped, one feels. Even the chubby little boys (Dalton, Larpent and Baker) feel the same abandonment. They like this better than the cricket. They catch the phrases as they bubble. (*W*, 27)

The bubbles are rising like the silver bubbles from the floor of a saucepan; image on top of image. (*W*, 35)
More and more bubbles into my mind as I talk, images and images. This, I say to myself, is what I need; why, I ask, can I not finish the letter that I am writing? For my room is always scattered with unfinished letters. (*W*, 61)

*The Waves* thus questions the nature of artistic creation and expression in terms of this dichotomy between the unfinished sketch and the finished work: indeed, Bernard can never finish a story. During the whole of the novel however, he is questioning literature in order to find some way of finishing his stories, of transforming his “bubbles” into works of art whose whole structure has an organic unity. Instead, his sentences are left dangling, tailing off as he fails to create a sense of unity and wholeness:

Yes, the appalling moment has come when Bernard's power fails him and there is no longer any sequence and he sags and twiddles a bit of string and falls silent, gaping as if about to burst into tears. Among the tortures and devastations of life is this then—our friends are not able to finish their stories.’ (*W*, 28)

It is precisely because Bernard’s phrases are slotted into the neat alphabetical “pigeon-holes” (*W*, 189) of his notebook that he will not be able to combine them or compose them:

I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found 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? (*W*, 133)

As Woolf argues in her essay on ‘Craftsmanship’,

There is the dictionary; there at our disposal are some half-a-million words all in alphabetical order. But can we use them? No, because words do not live in dictionaries, they live in the mind. Look again at the dictionary. There beyond a doubt lie plays more splendid than *Antony and Cleopatra*, poems more lovely than the *Ode to a Nightingale*; novels beside which *Pride and Prejudice* or *David Copperfield* are the crude bunglings of amateurs. It is only a question of finding the right words and putting them in the right
order. But we cannot do it because they do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind. (‘Craftsmanship’, CE2: 249-250)

The problem with Bernard’s “stories” is that they are conceived on a unidimensional horizontal sequence. As Neville says:

Let him describe what we have all seen so that it becomes a sequence. Bernard says there is always a story. I am a story. Louis is a story. There is the story of the boot-boy, the story of the man with one eye, the story of the woman who sells winkles. (W, 27)

“But what did Bernard feel for the plumber? Did he not only wish to continue the sequence of the story which he never stops telling himself? He began it when he rolled his bread into pellets as a child. One pellet was a man, one was a woman. We are all pellets. We are all phrases in Bernard’s story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B” (W, 50)

It is indeed only when he tries to sum up his life at the end of the novel,56 that he realizes that his fragmented literary method was intrinsically flawed because he was not musical (W, 180) and, as he reflects himself, it was music, above all, which would have been the ideal model for creating a unified and complete work of art through composition and combination, rhythm and harmony. Only then will the musical model thus present itself to him:

‘The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air. If I press them all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. 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—again like music. What a symphony with its concord and

56 ‘Now to sum up,’ said Bernard. ‘Now to explain to you the meaning of my life. Since we do not know each other (though I met you once, I think, on board a ship going to Africa), we can talk freely. The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed. This, for the moment, seems to be my life. If it were possible, I would hand it to you entirely. I would break it off as one breaks off a bunch of grapes. I would say, “Take it. This is my life.”’ (W, 168-169)
its discord, and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath, then grew up! Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be. With Neville, “Let’s discuss Hamlet.” With Louis, science. With Jinny, love. \((W, 182)\)

In *The Waves*, the implicit reference to orchestration in the passages revolving round the symphony has important implications. Not only does Bernard describe each voice or character in terms of a musical instrument, he also associates their personalities with certain phrases (or “tunes”, as Bernard calls them\(^{57}\)) which are to be handled throughout the narrative in a musical way in a similar manner to the musical themes which are passed from instrument to instrument in a symphony. Jinny will speak similarly of the symphonic model, her words from the first draft being more explicit than Bernard’s, and for this reason, of particular interest:

> It is like the first bar of a symphony [...]. You have said that before; \& you repeat it because that is the phrase out of which everything else is going to grow. \((W, \text{Draft I, page 218})\).

This points to two key musical compositional methods which Woolf possibly had in her mind at that time as a base for the musicalization of the novel, both derived from the overarching “symphonic” model we established in Chapter 4:

a) **the principle of thematic transformation**, a technique which was to underpin the symphonic genre in general from Beethoven onwards\(^{58}\) and for which the immense potential of the symphony for expressing new polyphonic orchestral textures will come to play a central role

\(^{57}\) Bernard’s use of the word “tune” is not only a token of his own popular and uneducated way of referring to the themes of a symphony, thus serving to ground his understanding of music in a non-technical sphere, but it also points to the melodic character of the themes written in the manner of “tunes” which one could sing – this seems to put into question those analyses of Woolf’s musicalization which take Schoenberg’s serialist style as touchstone (cf. our previous criticism of Schulz and Levin’s reading of the novel) – there is indeed no “tune” to speak of in serial music. There is no doubt that Woolf was thinking here of the tonal music typical of the nineteenth century in particular as the composer originally refered to by Bernard in the manuscript was Brahms, as we have mentioned elsewhere.

b) the structuring principles of the sonata-form in particular which was used traditionally in the first movement of most nineteenth century symphonies, which is what Jinny is here referring to in the draft version quoted above and which will play, as we shall argue below, a most important role in Woolf’s structural musicalization of The Waves.

Before we address the question of thematic transformation, we shall however turn first of all to our second point, the principles of the sonata-form, in order to account for the particularly striking overarching structure of Woolf’s 1931 novel.

Virginia Woolf’s constant preoccupation with the structure of the novel led her to consider various means of achieving an overarching “unity”. This was foremost in Virginia Woolf’s thoughts in the final stages of her composition, as she decided that Bernard’s final soliloquy would play an instrumental role in shaping the overall design of the novel, somehow counterbalancing the disjointed nature of the opening soliloquies. Bernard, the writer, thus faced the limitations of literature and rose to challenge them in Section 9: metanarratively turning against the narrative itself, he revealed Virginia Woolf’s own dissatisfaction with the alternance of soliloquies. The soliloquies were indeed described by Louis at the very start of the novel as an unsatisfactory method of narration, too fragmented, mere “beaten gongs”, an inferior sort of music in comparison to the “symphony with its concord and its discord”, the effect of which Woolf was striving to achieve herself in the novel: only then would “some other order”, a “better” order, make itself felt, and would thereby create something everlasting and complete:

The time approaches when these soliloquies shall be shared. We shall not always give out a sound like a beaten gong as one sensation strikes and then another. Children, our lives have been gongs striking; clamour and boasting; cries of despair; blows on the nape of the neck in gardens.

‘Now grass and trees, the travelling air blowing empty spaces in the blue which they then recover, shaking the leaves which then replace themselves, and our ring here, sitting, with our arms binding our knees, hint at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly. This I see for a second, and shall try tonight to fix in

59 see chapter 5, a. ‘A musical conception?’
words, to forge in a ring of steel, though Percival destroys it, as he blunders off, crushing the grasses, with the small fry trotting subservient after him. (W, 28)

If we glance at the original version of Bernard’s “summing up”, we find that music was definitely in Woolf’s mind even though, in Woolf’s characteristic manner, the direct reference was eventually deleted by the author. It is interesting to note that Bernard’s retelling of the story of his life was originally conceived musically in the holograph draft. Woolf originally writing, “& the music of that is what I want to eateh”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will now tell you in words of one syllable, how Mrs Constable (our old nurse) lifted her sponge &amp; words</td>
<td>In the beginning was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea. I saw something brighten – no doubt the brass handle of a cupboard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; the music of that is what I want to eateh. those are the words that I want.</td>
<td>Then Mrs Constable raised the sponge above her head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well then, to make a beginning, Mrs Constable, our old nurse, raised the sponge above her head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It does therefore seem that the role of Bernard’s final soliloquy in particular was conceived from a musical perspective and it cannot be put down to chance that its originality comes from the fact that he returns to the very opening pages of the novel and proceeds to repeat the whole of his (and his friends) life-story from the start, chronologically following the sequence of events which had just been narrated in the previous 163 pages or so of the novel. Within the literary context of a novel, such a repetition cannot be accounted for in purely literary terms, though interestingly, it is a common feature in music. In short, we wish to argue that Bernard’s final soliloquy plays the role of the recapitulation in a sonata-form structure as this is indeed one of
the principles on which the musical sonata-form is based, described by Kivy as, "a principle of repetition, of return".\textsuperscript{60} To this we now turn our attention.

As Kivy has noted in his study of the question - an essay entitled ‘The Fine Art of Repetition'\textsuperscript{61}, one of the most distinctive features of much eighteenth and nineteenth century music, is the way whole sections of movements are repeated practically note for note during the course of the movements, in particular, the repeat of the exposition at the end of the piece (albeit in a different key) in sonata-form structures. It is on this last type of musical "repeat" that we wish to focus at this point. Indeed, at the macro-level, the overall structure of \textit{The Waves} bears a particularly striking resemblance to the general outline of the sonata-form, understood in terms of arch-form – an exposition, a development, then a recapitulation of the exposition before a short final conclusive coda.\textsuperscript{62} As Kivy notes:

\begin{quote}
the obvious and elementary fact, to which the title of this essay ['The Fine Art of Repetition'] alludes, is simply that music alone, from Bach to Brahms, and before and beyond, consists to a large, although of course varying degree, in quite literal repetition of what has been heard before. Indeed, because quite frequently the repetition is literally literal, there is no need for the notes to be written down or printed a second time. So musicians have devised instructions, such as double dots in front of a double bar, or \textit{da capo}, or \textit{dal segno}, all of which tell the performer to go back to some designated place in the score or part and simply play the thing over again. Everyone knows this obvious and elementary fact.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Peter Kivy, \textit{The Fine Art of Repetition – Essays in the Philosophy of Music}, op.cit., p. 335.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{ibid.} pp. 327-359.
\textsuperscript{62} cf. James Webster, definition of 'Sonata Form', \textit{Grove Music Online}, “A typical sonata-form movement consists of three main sections, embedded in a two-part tonal structure. The first part of the structure coincides with the first section and is called the 'exposition'. The second part of the structure comprises the remaining two sections, the 'development' and the 'recapitulation'. The exposition divides into a 'first group' in the tonic and a 'second group' in another key, most often the dominant. Both first and second group may include numerous different ideas; the first or most prominent theme may be called the 'main theme', 'first subject', 'primary material' etc., while the most prominent theme in the second group is often called the 'second theme' (or 'subject'), whether or not it actually is the second important musical idea. The development (the misleading term 'free fantasia' is now obsolete) usually develops material from the exposition, as it modulates among one or more new keys. The last part of the development prepares the recapitulation. The recapitulation (or 'reprise'; but see §3 (iii)) begins with a simultaneous 'double return', to the main theme and to the tonic. It then restates most or all of the significant material from the exposition, whereby the second group is transposed to the tonic. The movement concludes either with a cadence in the tonic paralleling the end of the exposition, or with a coda following the recapitulation.”
\textsuperscript{63} Peter Kivy, \textit{The Fine Art of Repetition – Essays in the Philosophy of Music}, op.cit., p. 328.
Just as a story which repeats itself may be seen to verge on the absurd, the absurdity of the musical recapitulation was noted by many composers ranging from Grétry to Wagner.\textsuperscript{64} What was mainly criticized was the way the repeat impeded the dramatic development of the music by presenting the listeners with what was in fact a redundant musical moment. Significantly however, the model for a structure of continuous development without repeats in music was literature itself since the very principle of repetition goes against the literary grain, as Schenker perceptibly noticed: “language... prefers exactly the opposite strategy [to music] – that is, a continuous flow, without repetition”.\textsuperscript{65} What is interesting about Kivy’s analysis of the up-to-now puzzling role of the recapitulation in music is that he will approach it through the notion of rhythm and pattern. As we have already said, without repetition, there is no rhythm, without rhythm, no pattern. In such a way, Kivy will explain the role of the overarching repetitions of the sonata-form as creating a sense of an overarching pattern, a sense of unity and symmetry, and as Kivy will argue, achieving pattern in music is “the whole point of the exercise”.\textsuperscript{66} In \textit{The Waves}, Woolf’s musicalization of Bernard’s final soliloquy in terms of sonata-form could be said to have the same function.

A word of warning however must be made concerning the parallels we are drawing between \textit{The Waves} and the sonata-form. It is relatively easy to map the general structure of a novel in terms of exposition and development sections, as these could be said in music to progress sequentially and linearly, in the same way as would a story-line: the author introduces the characters and the themes of the novel in the first chapters and then proceeds to “develop” these themes and characters as the story progresses. But as we have pointed out, this sort of linear development in music was a borrowing from literature itself. As such, it does not interest us as much as the specifically musical characteristic of the sonata-form, i.e. its recapitulation, considering that in \textit{The Waves}, Woolf will depart in Episode 9 in particular, from the traditional progression of plot and story-line and in effect, use a purely musical procedure by making Bernard recapitulate the whole story from that beginning in his

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 335-336.
\textsuperscript{65} Schenker, quoted in Kivy, \textit{ibid.} p. 337.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Ibid.} p. 353.
final soliloquy. As Kivy humorously notes, if you give up the "principle of directionality, this 'continuous flow'" which is imitative of literary discourse, you end up by "giv[ing] up the literary model altogether" and you are left, and this is what is most important in our case, with a purely musical principle. Woolf would not be borrowing from music what music itself had borrowed from literature. It is furthermore very likely that on the evidence of the diary entries mentioning music in relation to Bernard's final soliloquy (in particular D3: 339 and D4: 4-5), and the corresponding (dated) sections of the novel in the draft she was writing at that time (i.e. section 969), as well as the fact that metanarratively, Bernard's remarks on the musicalization of fiction point to the musical importance of final episode in particular, the sonata-form may only have influenced Woolf's conception of Bernard's final soliloquy as musical "recapitulation" and not the structure of the novel up to then – the musicality of episodes 1 to 8 is another question altogether and we approached the matter in terms of polyphonic narratorial strategies in Chapter 4 and, as we shall see below, of "thematic transformation". Woolf's recourse to a musicalization of Bernard's final soliloquy in terms of sonata-form recapitulation can only, however, be understood in relation to the musical principle of thematic transformation put into play in the opening soliloquies in order to achieve the unity she desired.

67 If we were to briefly outline the structure of The Waves, it could be said that until the death of Percival, we are reading the 'exposition' (W, 6-105), from Percival's death to Bernard's final soliloquy, the themes are developed as the characters settle into their middle-age (W, 107-167), and finally – and this is where the musical principle of the 'recapitulation' comes into play -, Bernard's final soliloquy acts as the 'recapitulation' (W, 168-198) followed, after his account of the last meeting of the six friends at Hampton Court, by a brief 'coda', in which he outlines his desire to "fight" against death (W, 198-211). This structure is emphasized by the cross rhythms created by the motion of the day as the time of day in italicized passages describing the course of the sun corresponds to the time of day in the scenes in the main body of the text, thus unfolding in a parallel time (but in different years) to that of the italicized sections. Just as the first interlude dramatized the early morning sunrise, the novel will end on the rising dawn, the actual words and images of the first interlude repeated in Bernard's concluding phrases:

The sky is dark as polished whalebone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or of dawn. There is a stir of some sort – sparrows on plane trees somewhere chirping. There is a sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn. What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky? Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening. The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the files. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottages light their early candles. Yes, this is the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again.

(W, 210-211)

if we were to schematize: sun-rise = the children waking up; morning = morning lessons; late morning = service in the church; midday = lunch in the restaurant (before Percival's death); late afternoon = meeting in Hampton Court; through the night, till morning = Bernard's soliloquy.


69 cf. Graham, op.cit., p. 49.
Thematic transformation in Woolf's novels has actually been studied by many critics under many guises, not necessarily from a musical point of view. From a purely literary angle, it is indeed undeniable that many phrases are shared across the soliloquies, repeated in different contexts by different characters, scenes are re-enacted, re-interpreted or discussed at key-points throughout the novel. From a musical point of view, most critics bring out at this point the ever-popular but extraordinarily controversial Wagnerian "leitmotif" as one of Woolf's musical devices even though, as we have already pointed out, Woolf considered this device a mere gimmick within a literary context. Nevertheless, William A. Evans will happily write that "leit-motive in The Waves, as in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, is a central element of Virginia Woolf's technical artistry". However, it does appear that Evans' understanding of leitmotif is particularly broad and corresponds to the more general principles of thematic transformation:

leit-motif is a repetition of a significant extended word, phrase, image, metaphor; it is not theme [sic], for theme is more an idea or attitude, an abstraction. [...] Throughout the work, leit-motif is an organizational device, a technical means of drawing the characters and events into a unified structuring.

As such, even though Evans' nebulous use of the term "leitmotif" is typical of the "impressionistic" use of musical terms in literary critique, we cannot however, as such, fault his actual analysis of the repetitions of words, phrases, images and metaphors in Woolf's work, nor his understanding of them as unifying devices. For Virginia Woolf, music undeniably has the immense potential for creating artistic unity by relying on the repetition, combination and association of tones and melodic phrases, i.e. a unity based on a rhythmical design which is not rhythmical in the traditional sense of what one considers as "musical" rhythm (i.e. the rhythms one can tap), but in the way the melodic phrases echo each other, and thus create a sense of

70 cf. Virginia Woolf, 'Second Marriage', E2: 238, see also above page 38. Undeniably, Virginia Woolf did at one point admire the effect of the leitmotivic style of Wagner's music, noting that when the opera is over, it is surely the completeness of the work that remains with us. The earlier operas have always their awkward moments, when the illusion breaks; but Parsifal seems poured out in a smooth stream at white heat; its shape is solid and entire. (E1: 290)
These words are strikingly similar to those spoken by Bernard in The Waves: "It is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the laval flow of sentence into sentence that I need." (W, 57).
72 Ibid.
Internal correspondence within a self-contained organic design, in the same way as
the repeated touches of colour spread across the canvas give a painting a certain
general quality or hue. This translates itself in literature as a style based on the
repetition, combination and associations of words or images.\(^{73}\) Because it is so easy to
spot, E.M. Forster terms this effect as the “easy rhythm in fiction”, “which may be
defined as repetition plus variation, and which can be illustrated by examples”.\(^{74}\)

But in itself, the notion of thematic transformation, though giving the novel a
sense of unity through the repetition of events and phrases, is fundamentally
expressive of motion and metamorphosis, something in constant progression within a
chronological time-scale. In such a way, the notion of ‘thematic transformation’ on its
own would lead to an open-ended work which would not, for Woolf, be aesthetically
satisfactory because it would seem to be unachieved, an example of yet another of
Bernard’s “dangling wires”, but on a large scale. This, she noticed of De Quincey,
arguing that

the sensibility which was on the alert to warn him instantly if a sound clashed or a
rhythm flagged failed him completely when it came to the architecture of the whole.
Then he could tolerate a disproportion and profusion that make his books as dropsical
and shapeless as each sentence is symmetrical and smooth. (CE2: 4)

Woolf thus goes beyond the notion of thematic transformation by bringing into play
the overarching structural principles of the sonata-form and thereby expresses in her
novel the sense of the movement, evolution and metamorphosis of our experience of
life, but simultaneously contained within a stable atemporal form, through the

\(^{73}\) for a detailed analysis of Woolf’s use of repeated motifs in *The Waves*, we refer the reader to Evans, *op.cit.*

\(^{74}\) E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel, op.cit.*, pp. 165-170, cf. also Forster’s description of this “easy
rhythm” in Proust’s novels:

Heard by various people - first by Swann, then by the hero - the phrase of Vinteuil is not tethered: it is not a
banner such as we find George Meredith using - a double-blossomed cherry tree to accompany Clara
Middleton, a yacht in smooth waters for Cecilia Halkett. A banner can only reappear, rhythm can develop,
and the little phrase has a life of its own, unconnected with the lives of its auditors, as with the life of the
man who composed it. It is almost an actor, but not quite, and that 'not quite' means that its power has gone
towards stitching Proust's book together from the inside, and towards the establishment of beauty and the
ravishing of the reader's memory. There are times when the little phrase - from its gloomy inception,
through the sonata, into the sextet - means everything to the reader. There are times when it means nothing
and is forgotten, and this seems to me the function of rhythm in fiction; not to be there all the time like a
pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope. [...] I doubt
that it can be achieved by the writers who plan their books beforehand, it has to depend on a local impulse
when the right interval is reached. But the effect can be exquisite, it can be obtained without mutilating
the characters, and it lessens our need of an external form. (E.M. Forster *Aspects of the Novel, op.cit.*, pp. 168-169)
musicalization of Bernard’s final soliloquy, thus achieving in the final pages of the novel, an overall stability and an aesthetically satisfactory work.

T.S. Eliot evocatively captured this in ‘Burnt Norton’ in 1935, in what will become one of the poems of his collection *Four Quartets*. Like Woolf’s *The Waves*, these were inspired by Beethoven’s late string quartets:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now.

For T.S. Eliot, as for Woolf and Forster, music thus achieves its sense of perfection not from the superficial rhythms of the implied “rhythm” of the beats heard in the held notes of the violin, but from the fact that in music, as in literature, the themes are connected and interrelated through repetition and variation in a way that the last notes relate to the first notes and the first imply the last, thus obliterating any sense of sequence. The importance of Bernard’s “recapitulation” cannot, therefore, be underestimated and strangely enough, nobody has ever noticed its aesthetic function in the novel. In *The Waves*, music is an aesthetic paradigm inasmuch as it is the only art which combines the expression of chronological development through thematic transformation within the context of the overarching architectural stability and unity given by the mirror-image of exposition/recapitulation, in a form which folds back onto itself. As in T.S. Eliot’s poem, the effect is that of something in constant

---

transformation but whose motion is totally contained within the boundaries of its own organic form, achieving the stillness of a Chinese jar moving perpetually in its stillness.

c. The ‘singing of the real world’: a final word on Virginia Woolf’s musical aesthetics

If I could catch the feeling, I would:
the feeling of the singing of the real world. (Virginia Woolf)

Our investigation in the previous chapters of the musical aspects of Woolf’s novels has shown us that the three overarching aesthetic principles we determined during the course of our investigation, played a central role in her approach to the musicalization of fiction. The concepts of “complexity”, “simultaneity” and “unity” are thus fundamentally linked to her aesthetic and artistic outlook. If the musicalization of Mrs Dalloway and of The Waves revealed to us in which way music affects the narrative proper in its stylistic and formal aspects, it remains to be asked to what extent do her aesthetics of prose depend in fact on a musical perception of her vision of the world itself. Though we have touched upon this during the course of our evaluation of the musical paradigm within the context of her early short fiction in Chapter 3 in order to set the scene for our analysis of the novels in Chapters 4 and 5, we wish to conclude our analysis of the musical modalities of her longer fiction by highlighting the significance of music within the broader context of her aesthetic outlook. That she expresses her artistic vision in a musical way is undeniable – but that this vision itself is defined in terms of music remains by far the most original facet of Woolf’s literary achievement.

(i) Woolf’s musical conception of rhythm

To what extent did the musical model inform Woolf’s understanding of what she termed the “singing of the real world” (D3, 260) whose rhythms she sought to express in her novels? For her, music constantly breaks away from the frame of
"composed" music to be heard in a sort of music of the world itself. From 1905, in her essay on Street Music, Woolf, by humorously contrasting the "crude melodies" of the street musician to the polished world of the concert performer, will try and show how even the worst music is still music, and that all that differs is a certain mastery of expression and technique:

Whatever the accomplishment, we must always treat with tenderness the efforts of those who strive honestly to express the music that is in them; for the gift of conception is certainly superior to the gift of expression, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the men and women who scrape for the harmonies that never come while the traffic goes thundering by have as great a possession, though fated never to impart it, as the masters whose facile eloquence enchants thousands to listen. (‘Street Music’, E1: 28)

Music, for Woolf, is something which is accessible to all, because it is within our nature. Over and over again will the images of people walking in rhythm whilst “conducting” an invisible symphony, as we shall see below, or tapping out an unheard melody populate her novels. Music as we now know it, i.e. composed and taught, is a travesty of the music of nature because it has enclosed the rhythms and harmonies of the world into a prison of rules because “music incites within us something that is wild and inhuman like itself – a spirit that we would willingly stamp out and forget – that we are distrustful of musicians and loath to put ourselves under their power” (E1: 29). Civilization is to hold our own “capabilities” in “a perfect state of discipline” (E1: 29) and music has the power to disrupt this state of discipline because music has often, romantically, been associated with wildness and madness, cf. the typical satire of the long-haired musician: “it will be the god of music who will breathe madness into our brains, crack the walls of our temples” because music has also the (negative) power to hypnotize us, to make us “dance and circle for ever in obedience to his voice” (E1: 30). The problem is that the “whole of rhythm and harmony have been pressed, like dried flowers, into the neatly divided scales, the tones and semitones of the pianoforte.” (E1: 30). Of all “composed” music, dance music has the most power to actually move us physically, precisely because it’s rhythm is so accentuated. In The Voyage Out, Rachel will take over the ball when the musicians go home and play the only music she knows from the classical piano solo repertoire and by accentuating the beat, she transforms it into dance music. This ambivalent power of music can also
lead to excesses: "rhythm alone might easily lead to excesses" because it so easily sways our minds into set patterns:

The barrel-organ, for instance, by reason of its crude and emphatic rhythm, sets all the legs of the passers by walking in time; a band in the centre of the wild discord of cabs and carriages would be more effectual than any policeman; not only cabman but horse would find himself constrained to keep time in the dance, and to follow whatever measure of trot or canter the trumpets dictated. This principle has been in some degree recognised in the army, where troops are inspired to march into battle to the rhythm of the music. (E1: 31)

Rhythm alone is dangerous, but melody allied to rhythm has the power to create a "rhythmic harmony" which inspires "charity, love and wisdom", because "ill-temper or sarcasm would sound to the bodily ear as terrible discords and false notes" (E1: 31). Strangely enough, this seems to prefigure even today's attempts at curbing violence and yobbery in stations by piping Mozart into the sound systems or the manipulative use of so-called "background music" in shops and restaurants: Woolf herself said that if "at each street corner the melodies of Beethoven and Brahms and Mozart could be heard, it is probable that all crime and quarrelling would soon be unknown" (E1: 32). This also evokes the use of film music to convey atmosphere and pace to films (cf. horror films in particular express fear and suspense chiefly through the music). For Virginia Woolf, music is thus to be heard in life itself but also in our perception of the world, a world which is not only rhythm or melody but the combination of rhythm and harmony. As she once noted,

we all know that the voices of friends are discordant after listening to beautiful music because they disturb the echo of rhythmic harmony, which for the moment makes of life a united and musical whole; and it seems probable considering this that there is a music in the air from which we are always straining our ears and which is only partially made audible to us by the transcripts which the great musicians are able to preserve. In forests and solitary places an attentive ear can detect something very like a vast pulsation, and if our ears were educated we might hear the music also which accompanies this. (‘Street Music’, E1: 31)
It seems indeed that to the question, 'is rhythm always musical?', the answer may very well be, no, rhythm may also pertain to phenomenology, to physics or to mathematics. Whereas it could be argued that musical rhythm is but one of many facets of rhythm as such. For Virginia Woolf however, the notion of “rhythm” is not to be separated from its musical expression under any circumstances, music being “inborn in us”:

The beat of rhythm in the mind is akin to the beat of the pulse in the body; and thus though many are deaf to tune hardly any one is so coarsely organized as not to hear the rhythm of its own heart in words and music and movement. It is because it is thus inborn in us that we can never silence music, any more than we can stop our heart from beating; and it is for this reason too that music is so universal and has the strange and illimitable power of a natural force. (‘Street Music’, E1: 30)

Whereas rhythm is fundamentally a subdivision of movement (i.e. the perception of space in time) into discrete recurring “moments” or “points”, thus mainly functioning on a unidimensional linear plane, musical rhythm, except in the rarest of cases, introduces an additional multilayered dimension to the notion of rhythm through a complex polyphonic idiom. Rhythm in music cannot be dissociated from polyphony and, by extension, from harmony. It is precisely the fact that in music, “tune and harmony [are] united” to “rhythm” (E1: 31), i.e. that music creates a texture made up of simultaneous levels of sound, that music is such a powerful and expressive art and a model for Virginia Woolf’s own writing. Justin London gives a clear example in the article on ‘rhythm’ in the *Grove Music Online* of how “multileveled” rhythm, as he calls it,77 functions, by taking the opening bars from Bach’s first Prelude in C and highlighting the rhythmical textures (see Figure 31).

---

His dotted outline reveals the pattern of the rhythmical texture created by the “many levels of metric structure”\(^\text{79}\) in this piece. The first beat is the strongest because it is implied in all five contrapuntal levels, the other rhythmical points belong to only one, two, three or four levels at a time, creating thus a recognisable pattern of strong and weak beats. Whereas this Bach prelude is an example of a very simple rhythmical texture, many more complex textures can be found. Most if not all polyphonic music relies on multiple levels of rhythms, but never more so than in the music of Woolf’s own twentieth century. In Impressionist music in particular, every voice is handled independently, which has for consequence a completely different way of listening to music: listening to it in terms of layering of sound and multi-focal attention within a relatively free structure. In Maurice Ravel’s ‘Oiseaux Tristes’ (‘Mournful Birds’), from *Miroirs* (1905), different elements, which in themselves form a whole (like the right-hand “bird” figuration, bar 2 – see Figure 32 below), are repeated at intervals within their own sphere or layer, self-contained and independent. Each line or “layer” functions according to its own rhythm and beat, some giving the illusion of being slower, some faster, thus contributing to emphasize the independence of each focal point. Heard together, they create a cross-texture of harmonic colours and rhythms:

\(^{78}\) ibid.
\(^{79}\) ibid.
Another example of complex cross-rhythms can be found in Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, which Virginia Woolf was no doubt familiar with,\(^8\) which is a particularly rhythmically complex score, as the following page shows, taken from Part I, ‘L’Adoration de la Terre’ (see figure 10: note the simultaneous audition of binary rhythms, ternary rhythms and syncopated rhythms).

---


Figure 33. Stravinsky, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, last 5 bars, Part I, 'L’Adoration de la Terre'\(^82\)

---

Melba Cuddy-Keane will not turn to Impressionist music, nor to Stravinsky’s style, in her study of Woolf’s musicality but to the even more avant-garde works of Cage’s experimental music which, it must be said, owes much to Impressionism. She will thus describe Woolf’s short story, ‘Kew Gardens’, as “integrated polytextural music”\textsuperscript{83} which draws on modern sound technologies and electro-acoustic aesthetics. The narrative is actually centred on the snail, who, like a “microphone” set in a bush, “records” indiscriminately the sounds which pass, people talking, leaves crunching, etc. What is however notable is not the way each element is evoked in succession but how Virginia Woolf attempts to blur the outlines and fuse the elements into one vertically complex stream in an attempt to “harmonize” the scene. As Cuddy-Keane argues,

\begin{quote}
Time as progression in conversation (the idea of beginning, middle, and end) is here subordinated, as in much electroacoustic music, to relations among disparate points in space. [...] Woolf’s composition has an experimental, aleatoric quality in its inclusion of ambient noise and environmental sound and there is a nonhierarchical, noncentered treatment of multiple voices in which each contributes equally to the whole. And there is, too, a nontraditional perception of wholeness – comprehensive but not unified around a centre – and a nontraditional sense of pattern – neither humanly ordered nor anthropocentric.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Thus, the last page of ‘Kew Gardens’ will present a multi-layered, multi-dimensional “musical” space:

\begin{quote}
Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere. How hot it was! So hot that even the thrush chose to hop, like a mechanical bird, in the shadow of the flowers, with long pauses between one movement and the next; instead of rambling vaguely the white butterflies danced one above another, making with their white shifting flakes the outline of a shattered marble column; above the tallest flowers the glass roofs of the palm house shone as if a whole market full of shiny green umbrellas had opened in the sun;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{83} Cuddy-Keane, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{84} Cuddy-Keane, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 85.
and in the drone of the aeroplane the voice of the summer sky murmured its fierce soul. Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless and lay huddled upon the ground, but their voices went wavering from them as if they were flames lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles. Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence? But there was no silence; all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air. ('Kew Gardens', SF, 95)

In a way, these events, elements or sounds which Woolf dramatizes in 'Kew Gardens' could be said to compose the literary counterpart to a musical score. In that short extract, the murmur of the city is indeed layered with the voices above and the flowers above that – the harmony and polyphony of the world existing here as a synaesthetic experience in which every sense participates, the musical score becoming a metaphor for the world itself.

(ii) ‘We are the words, we are the music, we are the thing itself’: the music of creation

Woolf goes a step further in her last novel, Between the Acts. The image of the darting birds on a backdrop of straight and regular trees will visually suggest a musical score, the trees compared to bar-lines across which the dot-like birds, like notes on a score, dance and dart in rhythm to the music played on the gramophone. That Woolf had the complex cross-rhythms of Stravinsky’s music in mind is undeniable as she makes a reference to the Russian dancers in the passage in question:
The other trees were magnificently straight. They were not too regular; but regular enough to suggest columns in a church; in a church without a roof; in an open-air cathedral, a place where swallows darting seemed, by the regularity of the trees, to make a pattern, dancing, like the Russians, only not to music, but to the unheard rhythm of their own wild hearts. (BA: 80)

Suddenly the tune stopped. The tune changed. A waltz, was it? Something half known, half not. The swallows danced it. Round and round, in and out they skimmed. Real swallows. Retreating and advancing. And the trees, O the trees, how gravely and sedately like senators in council, or the spaced pillars of some cathedral church. . . . Yes, they barred the music, and massed and hoarded; and prevented what was fluid from overflowing. (BA. 212-213)

A few pages later, in a similar passage, one of the trees, covered in raucous starlings, will strikingly suggest the image of a symphony orchestra:

Then suddenly the starlings attacked the tree behind which she had hidden. In one flock they pelted it like so many winged stones. The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire. A whizz, a buzz rose from the bird-buzzing, bird-vibrant, bird-blackened tree. The tree became a rhapsody, a quivering cacophony, a whizz and vibrant rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabling discordantly life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree. Then up! Then off! (BA, 244-245)

In this novel, the whole of nature will thus participate in creating images of musical scores. In the following passage, the flowers, the trees and the birds form a musical backdrop on which the cows become themselves equivalents to musical voices – one standing still while the other moves forward:

The inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony? “When we wake” (some were thinking) “the day breaks us with its hard mallet blows.” “The office” (some were thinking) “compels disparity. Scattered, shattered, hither thither summoned by the bell. ‘Ping-ping-ping’ that’s the phone. ‘Forward!’ ‘Serving!’— that’s the shop.” So we answer to the infernal, agelong and eternal order issued from on high. And obey. “Working, serving, pushing, striving, earning wages—to be spent—here? Oh dear no. Now? No, by and by. When ears are deaf and the heart is dry.”
Here Cobbet of Cobbs Corner who had stooped—there was a flower—was pressed on by people pushing from behind.

For I hear music, they were saying. Music wakes us. Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. Look and listen. See the flowers, how they ray their redness, whiteness, silverness and blue. And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabling, their green and yellow leaves hustle us and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still. (BA, 142-143)

In all these scenes, the complex and disparate elements combine together to suggest a certain atmosphere, mood or emotion, in the same way as the harmonic textures in Impressionist music are built up from different tones which, resonating together will give that musical passage a particular sonic quality or colour. For the Modernists and Virginia Woolf in particular, music is the art whose mode of expression creates a complex system of relations or correspondences through rhythm and harmony, a model by which she may suggest in her own works the synaesthetic nature of man’s experience of the world. It is to be noted that the etymology of the term “harmony” points to something which is “joined together”, from the same Indo-European root “ar”, “to fit together”.85 Carl Dahlhaus will thus define ancient Greek “harmony” as the “combining or juxtaposing of disparate or contrasted elements”.86 For Virginia Woolf, the music of the world is truly “music” – the composed music is only a “transcript”87 of the true music: and it comes from the way the disparate elements in the world combine in time and rhythm on different levels, in order to create a sort of contrapuntal harmony.

In Virginia Woolf’s texts however, there is an undeniable tendency to make the musicalization function both ways, music giving rise to stream of consciousness but also stream of consciousness determined by musical analogies. In such a way, the most unmusical stream of consciousness contexts will be pervaded by musical features. Music thus plays a crucial role in Woolf’s fiction, from the “unmusical” rendering of musical performances to the musicalization of “unmusical” events. In

---

86 Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Harmony’ §1, Grove Music Online, op.cit.
87 see above, cf. E1: 31.
*The Waves*, Louis, sitting in an eating house in Cambridge, will find his thoughts being paced by the rhythm of the passing crowds and the swing of the doors:

People go on passing; they go on passing against the spires of the church and the plates of ham sandwiches. The streamers of my consciousness waver out and are perpetually torn and distressed by their disorder. [...] Meanwhile the hats bob up and down; the door perpetually shuts and opens. I am conscious of flux, of disorder; of annihilation and despair. If this is all, this is worthless. Yet I feel, too, the rhythm of the eating-house. It is like a waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round. The waitresses, balancing trays, swing in and out, round and round, dealing plates of greens, of apricot and custard, dealing them at the right time, to the right customers. The average men, including her rhythm in their rhythm ("I would take a tenner; for it blocks up the hall") take their greens, take their apricots and custard. Where then is the break in this continuity? What the fissure through which one sees disaster? The circle is unbroken; the harmony complete. Here is the central rhythm; here the common mainspring. I watch it expand, contract; and then expand again. (*W*, 67-68)

In *Mrs Dalloway*, a similar passage will bring to light the “musicality” of the luncheon party:

And so there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or grand deception practised by hostesses in Mayfair from one-thirty to two, when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion in the first place about the food—how it is not paid for; and then that the table spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver, little mats, saucers of red fruit; films of brown cream mask turbot; in casseroles severed chickens swim; coloured, undomestic, the fire burns; and with the wine and the coffee (not paid for) rise jocund visions before musing eyes; gently speculative eyes; eyes to whom life appears musical, mysterious. (*Mrs D*, 115-116)

Mr Ambrose striding along the Embankment in his long blue cloak in the opening scene of *The Voyage Out*, will “beat the time” with his hand as if he were conducting
his own private symphony and Peter Walsh’s walk through London in *Mrs Dalloway*, will similarly take on a musical dimension: “Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour” (*Mrs D*, 54). In *Jacob’s Room*, “no one stands still. It seems as if we marched to the sound of music; perhaps the wind and the river; perhaps these same drums and trumpets—the ecstasy and hubbub of the soul” (*JR*, 112). One of the most striking examples of such reversed musicalization occurs in the opening scene of *To the Lighthouse* when the comforting sounds of the men working and the children playing cricket suddenly stop and Mrs Ramsey is made aware of how these sounds, blended with the regular beat of the waves on the shingle in the distance had underpinned the flow of her thoughts:

> The monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, “I am guarding you—I am your support,” but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow—this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (*TTL*, 29-30)

Such examples abound in Virginia Woolf’s works. Interestingly, Claude Debussy will encapsulate the relation between the world’s intrinsic “harmony” and music in the following words:

> Qui connaitra le secret de la composition musicale? Le bruit de la mer, la courbe d’un horizon, le vent dans les feuilles, le cri d’un oiseau déposent en nous de multiples impressions. Et, tout a coup, sans que l’on y consent le moins du monde, l’un de ces souvenirs se répand hors de nous et s’exprime en langage musical. Il porte en lui-même

---

88 “in the streets of London where beauty goes unregarded, eccentricity must pay the penalty, and it is better not to be very tall, to wear a long blue cloak, or to beat the air with your left hand.” (*VO*, 5)
It is by suggesting that there exist correspondences - what Terence Hewet metaphorically describes as “fireworks” which make “figures” - between the varied and complex perceptions of our experiences of life, that the artist seeks to express the hidden nature of things: “That perhaps is your task”, will say Virginia Woolf in her “Letter to a Young Poet”, “to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole, not a fragment” (CE2: 191). Debussy will similarly wish that the music of the future “could have a freedom which it contains perhaps more than any other art, since it is not limited to reproducing more or less precisely nature, but the mysterious correspondences between Nature and the Imagination”. A chord or a harmonic or melodic sequence, is built out of several elements which combining, create a specific colour or effect made out of the blend of several tones, which, being a unique blend, offers us a unique experience, which goes far beyond the single experiences of each tone. In a humorous letter to her friend the composer and conductor Ethel Smyth, Virginia comments on her own “musical” style (here her epistolic style) using the musical analogy of the “scale” - whose notes are blended together in one single imperceptible movement, as opposed to the clear-cut feelings which Ethel “shouted” into her letter:

That's the trouble with the daughters of generals - either things are black, or they're white; either they're sobs or they're 'shouts' - whereas, I always glide from semi-tone to semi-tone; and you never hear the difference between one and another. That's why you don't understand a word I write, either in MS. or print; for its long been plain to me that you don't. (L5: 217)

89 “Who knows the secret of musical composition? The sound of the sea, the curve of the horizon, the wind in the leaves, the cry of a bird – all these things leave within us multiple impressions. And suddenly, without us even knowing, one of these memories spills out of us and expresses itself in music. It carries within itself its harmony. Whatever effort we may make, none will be as true or sincere. Only then will a heart destined to music make the most beautiful discoveries” (my translation) Claude Debussy – Monsieur Croche et Autres Ecrits, Paris: Gallimard, 1987, p. 303.

90 my translation (“Je voulais a la musique une liberté qu'elle contient peut-être plus que n'importe quel art, n'étant pas bornée à une reproduction plus ou moins exacte de la nature, mais aux correspondances mystérieuses entre la Nature et l'Imagination.”), Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche et Autres Ecrits, op.cit., p. 61.
Music offers therefore the ideal model of this duality, both embodying and expressing the complexity of our modes of experience which literature, and especially prose, failed to do and which Virginia Woolf attempted to attain. Taking, for instance, something as insignificant as a moth and finding in it, or, in the words of Terence Hewet, behind it, the essence of life:

The same energy which inspired the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses, and even, it seemed, the lean bare-backed downs, sent the moth fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane. One could not help watching him. One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him. The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various that to have only a moth’s part in life, and a day moth’s at that, appeared a hard fate, and his zest in enjoying his meagre opportunities to the full, pathetic. He flew vigorously to one corner of his compartment, and, after waiting there a second, flew across to the other. What remained for him but to fly to a third corner and then to a fourth? That was all he could do, in spite of the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer out at sea. What he could do he did. Watching him, it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or nothing but life.

Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvellous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zig-zagging to show us the true nature of life. (‘The Death of the Moth’, 359-360)

Very often the music of the Impressionist age is considered as descriptive music – and it is true that in Ravel’s piece, ‘Noctuelles’ (‘Moths’), for instance, the fluttering of the moths is evocatively suggested by the fast arpeggiated broken figurations. However, as the renowned painter Kandinsky, will say of even the most “impressionistic” of Debussy’s music – and we may add here, the music of Ravel, “he [Debussy] never confines himself to the notes perceived by the ear, which is the characteristic of programmatic music; he aims, beyond the notes, at integrating the
inner meaning of his impressions.”91). In such a way, the central section of Noctuelles defies any programmatic reading as it departs from the more “descriptive” style to simply evoke something dark and expressive (“sombre et expressif”). Noctuelles is the first piece of a book of pieces called “Miroirs”, mirrors, and it seems that we have truly gone through the looking-glass to touch the essence of the moth, Munch’s “picture on the reverse side of the eye”, just as Virginia Woolf will use the moth, in her short story, “The Death of the Moth” as but a pretext to suggest and express the essence of life and death which it contains – a “thread of light” becoming visible through the moth. When talking about the style of De Quincey, an author Woolf greatly admired for the musicality of his style, she clearly articulates this idea of the artist’s vision, of going “through the looking-glass”, and to quote this passage yet again:

For page after page we are in company with a cultivated gentleman who describes with charm and eloquence what he has seen and known - the stage coaches, the Irish rebellion, the appearance and conversation of George the Third. Then suddenly the smooth narrative parts asunder, arch opens beyond arch, the vision of something for ever flying, for ever escaping, is revealed, and time stands still. (CE4: 6-7)

In such a way, the musicality of the writing of Virginia Woolf is not something which is imposed from the outside. This is why, for her, musicality is inherent to the artist’s vision of life, something she stated very strongly in one of her last texts, a late autobiographical reflection on why she felt the need to write literature:

It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what ; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of a work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we

91 This echoes Edvard Munch’s famous assertion that “Art is the antithesis of nature. ... Nature is not only that which is visible to the eye – it also presents the inner picture of the soul – the pictures on the reverse side of the eye”, quoted in Paul Roberts, op.cit., p. 84.
are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock... All artists I suppose feel something like this. (MB, 72, my italics)

Woolf is not saying here that music is a way of subliming the chaos and formlessness of the world. The finality of the work of art is not to give us a transcendental alternative to the world, even though music may indeed have been considered to have done so in the past. But Beethoven, Shakespeare and God are falsely idolized. Too often are they seen to be explaining the world through their works, giving us the true reasons and meanings for our otherwise inexplicable and mysterious lives. The only way a Beethoven quartet tells us the “truth” about the hidden pattern which Woolf perceives amidst the formless chaotic matter of the “vast mass that we call the world” is because this work is itself intrinsically pure pattern. In such a way, neither Beethoven, Shakespeare nor God are telling us anything about the world itself. There is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven, there is no God, but their art – the words, the music - show us how we may pull ourselves out of the “cotton-wool” and hear the singing of the real world by creating our own works of art out of the world, just as Woolf herself felt the need to make patterns out of her world by writing them into her fictional worlds, a scene coming “right” or a character coming “together”, as in the following passage from To the Lighthouse:

there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular, intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dismembered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dorbeetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last, in the evening, one after another silence falls. With the sunset sharpness was lost, and like mist rising, quiet rose, quiet spread, the wind settled; loosely the world shook itself down to sleep, darkly here without a light to it, save what came green suffused through leaves, or pale on the white flowers in the bed by the window. (TTL, 218)

92 Werner Wolf is therefore very much mistaken in thinking that Woolf’s understanding of the musical paradigm in terms of a “quasi-romantic [...] means of redemption from all division and earthly reason [...]” is “suspicious”. Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction – A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, op.cit., p. 180.
All artists are musicians because they find musical connexions in the orts, scraps and fragments of our perceptions and this is best expressed in Woolf's last novel:

Mrs. Swithin caressed her cross. She gazed vaguely at the view. She was off, they guessed, on a circular tour of the imagination— one-making. Sheep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one. If discordant, producing harmony—if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head. And thus—she was smiling benignly— the agony of the particular sheep, cow, or human being is necessary; and so—she was beaming seraphically at the gilt vane in the distance—we reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall. (BA, 204)

The work of art is thus a perpetual discovery of our own artistic potential.
CONCLUSION

'Now, to sum up', said Bernard.

The starting point of this study was a perceived dichotomy between the potential unalienable specificity of musical expression and meaning vis à vis all other forms of artistic expression, literary included, and the attempt made by Modernist authors to integrate aspects of this musical idiom into their own literary works. Whereas the musicality of most major Modernist authors, from Proust to Joyce, Thomas Mann, or Aldous Huxley, has already been emphasized and investigated in depth in past and current literary critiques, Virginia Woolf's musicality has been greatly underestimated and very often misunderstood. Because of their limited scope, the very few existing studies of the question have often failed to grasp the significance and the wider implications of the musical paradigm in her aesthetics of prose.

We determined from the onset that music played a much more important role in Virginia Woolf's literary life than has ever been credited, and that it was undeniable that her life-experiences in general, musical included, were the raw material which nourished the body of her literary work. In Chapter 1, we showed how her experience and her technical knowledge of music had very often been underplayed, especially as both Leonard Woolf and Quentin Bell minimized her musical interests and went as far as suggesting that music did not have any special role in her writing. Her diaries, letters and essays reveal however that this was far from being the case. Music was never far from her thoughts and her in-depth knowledge of the Western classical repertoire as well as her technical proficiency in this art were far more comprehensive than had ever been thought. From looking at Woolf's experience of music to analysing the musicalization of her fiction is however a big step to take and one which some scholars would be very wary of making.

Strangely enough, it is relatively easy to determine that Woolf herself felt that music influenced her writing and that it most certainly had a direct impact on her conception of the novels themselves, but it is far more difficult to show how these works are in any way musical without imposing this musicality from without on what are after all, purely literary devices, a tricky and we fully admit, an often controversial operation. From "within", Woolf's novels are neither about music as such nor do they
consistently raise the issue of the musicalization of Modernist fiction, unlike Huxley’s ostentatious study in symphonic writing, for instance, starting with the clever and suggestive title, *Point Counter Point*. If anything therefore, Woolf’s musicalization of fiction was to be taken foremost as a process, rather than a *fait accompli*. The *fait accompli*, the novel itself, could indeed be said to be the least musical of all, that “cannibal”, as Woolf once termed it (‘Poetry, Fiction and the Future’, *E4*:435), having obviously “devoured” music from head to toe and not left a scrap of evidence behind. Understood therefore in terms of process, Woolf’s musicalization is two-fold: on the one hand, it is that by which she could best formulate or rather, verbalize her thoughts, and on the other hand, it is also embedded at the very core of her artist’s outlook, Woolf finding music in those patterns of life which she wished to capture in her novels. “It is a mistake to stand outside examining ‘methods’”, Woolf will argue, “any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express if we are writers” (‘Modern Fiction’, *E4*: 162), or in other words, “the better a thing is expressed, the more completely it is thought” (*L3*: 197). Virginia Woolf undeniably thought in terms of music but expressed herself in terms of literature and this made it very difficult to clearly delineate the literary role music was to play in her aesthetics of prose. In which way was it then possible to approach this musical method by which she was to express what she wished to express when the result was so through and through literary? Woolf’s thoughts on artistic impersonality were a further spoke in the well-oiled wheel of interdisciplinary scholarship as it meant that she deliberately bypassed all the typical signs of an outward and explicit manifestation of her musicality. Whereas Woolf’s diaries and letters attest to her intentions of drawing in her novels on musical principles, at the same time, she avoided making these intentions clear in the novels themselves since, for her, the ideal work of art is impersonal and anonymous. The novel, to achieve the status of a work of art, must be neither useful nor political. It must avoid preaching at all costs and this includes preaching about its own literary qualities. A self-confessed musicalized novel is a failed work of art because it is drawing attention to its craft rather than to its essence. The significance of the musical model, itself seen to be the paradigm for an impersonal handling of prose, had never been discussed and yet, this was the key to Woolf’s musicality. As a consequence, the established typology of typical interdisciplinary relations was put under severe pressure by Woolf’s idiosyncratic understanding of the musical paradigm. This eventually led us to work towards
proposing in Chapter 4 a new general methodological approach to musicalized fiction, i.e. an alternative typology which would bring to light different melopoetic fluxes in the light of our analysis of Woolf’s melopoetic aesthetics.

That nobody has ever agreed either as to the nature of musical expression or as to the meaning of music is often overlooked, even though (or perhaps because) the technical modalities of musical compositions are (too) easily determined, in particular when seen in the shadow of innovative and explicitly “musical” stylistic literary experiments. This has led many interdisciplinary scholars down the much trodden path of one-to-one technical correspondences whilst at the same time turning a blind eye to the actual relevance of these correspondences. As most interdisciplinary parallels are made on the technical level rather than on the aesthetic plane, very often the studies concerned with Woolf’s musicalization of fiction remain but superficial exercises, stopping short in their analyses from giving us any significant conclusions as to the wider-reaching implications of Woolf’s thinking in terms of music, implications which affect not only our interpretations of Woolf’s prose but also, and most importantly, the way we approach musical meaning itself. That the structure of a novel or a text can be considered to imitate the structure of a piece of music is interesting to a point, but it leads us to ask, what did Virginia Woolf see in music which attracted her in the first place? Finding leitmotives in novels or associating the principles of musical composition to the web of “petite phrases” can be informative, but highlighting the aesthetic relevance and purport of these parallels should be the next essential step, one very rarely attempted since it raises difficult and controversial aesthetic, musicological and epistemological issues. Justifying one’s analyses simply because we know from the paratextual evidence that Virginia Woolf drew the parallels herself is unacceptable but often the case in Woolfian scholarship. The question remains: why did she do so? Certainly not because she did. If sonata-form or fugue are tokens of the expression of circularity and completeness as Fleishman concludes with a pleased flourish, why can we not just take circularity and completeness as such. What is it in the musical expression of circularity and completeness (if at all) which is more relevant than the non-musical definition of these concepts? Why bring in music at all? And why did Virginia Woolf bring in music? Many critics, Fleishman included, do not ask these questions and unwittingly trample over the delicate borders of musicological integrity. What these questions bring to light are the innumerable assumptions we unwittingly make about music and
until we know why music so appealed to her, we cannot determine the how of why it is appealing nor establish a common ground on which any interchange can happen between these two arts. On which terms did Virginia Woolf approach musical expression in relation to her own literary expression? In other words, to what extent did Virginia Woolf perceive music to be literary and literature musical, if at all? Even though our study focuses on the latter case, the former point necessarily needed addressing or else our study, like so many other interdisciplinary investigations, would have been grounded on very shaky musicological notions. If we were to reconstruct the bridge which Woolf had established between these two arts, it was necessary to refine our understanding of her musicality by highlighting in Chapters 2 and 3 the ways in which she understood the nature of musical expression in its relation to language, for the musicalization of fiction is, after all, a musicalization of language itself.

Fascinated from her earliest years by the mysterious and ambivalent nature of musical expression and having written several articles on the subject, Woolf finally took the plunge and approached the matter head-on in 1921, in one of her experimental short stories. In ‘The String Quartet’, Virginia Woolf was to outline her most comprehensive aesthetics of music yet and to this story we therefore turned first in Chapters 2 and 3 before weighing the implications of her musical insight within the context of her full-length novels in Chapters 4 and 5. Though The Voyage Out, her first novel, undeniably dramatizes the relations between music and literature through the intersecting lives of her characters, Rachel Vinrace, a pianist, and Terence Hewet, a young novelist, music is treated as but one of many themes: an important aspect of the novel, music was not yet seen, at that early stage in Woolf’s literary development, as a potential method by which to develop an innovative narrative strategy, even though hints of many of Woolf’s later ideas can be felt in this text. ‘The String Quartet’, on the other hand, was without doubt a deliberate exploration of the verbalization of music in which Virginia Woolf departed from the more traditional theories of musical meaning by going beyond a series of predictable, deliberately simplistic or prejudiced responses to music in a bid to understand the more essential relations between the verbal, language, and the non-verbal, music. By establishing that Virginia Woolf was well aware of the more problematical aspects of culturally motivated and conventional non-musical associations which too often go unquestioned in our responses to music, we revealed that Woolf’s interest in the
musical paradigm focused paradoxically precisely on those purely musical characteristics which have been seen, since Hanslick’s time, to make music unique and distinct from the other arts: the very fact that music is fundamentally non-linguistic, unrepresentative and in essence, abstract. That Woolf may have drawn easy parallels between literature and literary interpretations of music was thus clearly out of the question, notwithstanding the fact that such parallels can hardly be considered to be truly melopoetic in the first place. Interestingly, the verbalization of the music as such did not fail because it played on the more typical musico-literary planes. The technical parallels remained incredibly clear: it was relatively easy to decode from the highly descriptive dream-sequences the corresponding musical features of the piece, to follow step by step the musical moments – from the initial flourish of the bows, the sustained ostinato and the interweaving melodic lines to the delineation and internal structures of the movements themselves. Even the notion of harmonic rhythm became evident. Words were chosen to describe the tempo, speed and textures of the music. From there, we highlighted the ways in which Woolf dramatized the meanings usually attributed to these otherwise purely technical and abstract notions. A fast tempo was made to signify happiness, the slow movement in a minor key was expressive of melancholy, counterpointed themes were understood as a dialogue between two characters, etc. Immediately, the problem of referentiality was found to lie at the crux of the matter. Music, in this story, was indeed first made to be representative and thus the whole gambit of potential musical “meanings” was put before our very eyes, but so doing, Woolf surreptitiously warped these meanings, undermined the narrative and put into question the whole experiment: none of these responses were satisfactory because they were either too literal or they were too literary. Thus symbolically marching into the desert at the close of the performance, the narrator discards all her emotional and imaginative crutches and leaves far behind any hermeneutic signposts as words finally failed her and she falls back in despair, “eager no more, desiring only to go”, illustrating the fact that for Woolf, such a type of cross-art verbalization is “so formal, so superficial, that we can hardly force our lips to frame it; while the emotion is distinct, powerful, and satisfactory. [...] we try to describe it and we cannot; and then it vanishes, and having seen it and lost it, exhaustion and depression overcome us; we recognize the limitations which Nature has put upon us” (CE2: 242-243). The “emotion” of the musical experience of the narrator in this short story was surely “distinct, powerful and satisfactory” but her despair was not, as Werner Wolf thought,
a sign of dissatisfaction with the "reality" of London versus the sort of transcendent musical paradise of the performance, but a dissatisfaction with herself, i.e. her failure to verbalize the intensity of her experience of the music. It was between the acts (or rather between the movements), that the narrator came closest to expressing the effect of the music in a description of significantly wordless actions: "I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink sharp wine" will she exclaim in delight after the first movement. The second movement will make her see the world with a child's sense of wonder, everything appearing "very strange, very exciting", out of proportion, a new world to be explored and apprehended in terms of music. As a result, the parallels between music and literature in the works of Virginia Woolf could not be considered on the literal plane as Woolf herself is aware that any attempt at describing or verbalizing music only scratches the surface of the musical experience. We must search elsewhere for our interdisciplinary common ground and paradoxically, Virginia Woolf finds it to lie in those very divergences between music and literature which 'The String Quartet' revealed: it is precisely because music escapes verbalization and therefore has nothing to do with words that it has such a strong effect on our imagination. Describing the music played at the funeral of Roger Fry, Woolf appreciated in particular the wordlessness of the music: "They played again – Anon, I think: old music. Yes, I liked the wordlessness." (D4: 243). For Woolf the effect of music lies not in its capacity to rouse images and narratives as the narrator described what after all were cheap emotions and easy thrills. Neither "despair" nor "hope", "sorrow" nor "joy" were terms which could ever come close to expressing the intensity and complexity of the musical experience. As Woolf argues, such a verbalization "is not a description at all; it leaves out the meaning" and so she asks, "but what sort of meaning is that which cannot be expressed in words?" (CE2: 243) To this we turned to in Chapters 4 and 5.

If 'The String Quartet' can be understood to be an exploration of the shortcomings of the verbalization of music, it also re-establishes the inalienable non-verbal specificity of the musical idiom. If in the words of Rhoda, language can only express the "like and like and like" of a metaphorical illusion of reality, then music, because it does not function according to the representative principles of language, may possibly get us closer to "the thing which lies beneath the semblance of the thing" (W, 116). But what is "the thing which lies beneath the semblance of the thing"? As Virginia Woolf's very first hero stated:
"What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play
the piano, I expect," he began, turning and speaking over his shoulder. "We want to
find out what’s behind things, don’t we?—Look at the lights down there," he continued,
"scattered about anyhow. Things I feel come to me like lights. . . . I want to combine
them. . . . Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures? . . . I want to make figures. .
. . Is that what you want to do?"

Now they were out on the road and could walk side by side.

“When I play the piano? Music is different. . . . But I see what you mean.” (VO, 221-
222)

Music was thus to be a bridge between the “silent territory” of pure disembodied
“meaning” (‘Walter Sickert’, CE2: 242, 243), a meaning which we apprehend before
we find words to describe it, and her verbalized, highly representative literary
expression of this meaning. By seeking “some design more in accordance” with those
moments which escape linguistic definition (W, 169), Virginia Woolf turns to music
to express “what is startling, what is unexpected, what we cannot account for” (W,
172). Escaping the constriction of words, music is thus seen to express in its own non-
verbal way that which escapes those words which cheat us so often because they are
too “facile”, “artificial, insincere” (W, 59). As Bernard remarks:

Blue, red—even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light
through. How describe or say anything in articulate words again?—save that it fades,
save that it undergoes a gradual transformation, becomes, even in the course of one
short walk, habitual—this scene also. Blindness returns as one moves and one leaf
repeats another. Loveliness returns as one looks, with all its train of phantom phrases.
(W, 204)

Of all of Woolf’s novels, The Waves is the one which actually enacts the pre-verbal
thought process by drawing on the otherness of music. Poised in the no-man’s land
between thought and language, The Waves writes itself in the “silent territory” of
wordless music and as such draws on musical techniques characteristic of the
symphonic genre in order to transcend the limitations of its material. In The Waves,
words are not meant to represent music, as many critics tried to argue, but rather the
narrative itself is made to enact musical principles because for Virginia Woolf, these
principles are the very basis of our own phenomenological understanding of the world around us. In *The Waves*, Woolf is thus exploring the processes of own consciousness by pushing the boundaries of the narrative voice in order to express three core phenomenological concepts: simultaneity, complexity and unity, terms which define Woolf’s “moments of being”. Only in music however do these three concepts come into play at the same time – simultaneity of voicing, complexity of musical elements, and unity of structure within a defined time-scale. As Rachel Vinrace said to Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out*:

> “Why do you write novels? You ought to write music. Music, you see”— she shifted her eyes, [...] — “music goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once. With writing it seems to me there’s so much” — she paused for an expression, and rubbed her fingers in the earth—“scratching on the matchbox.” *(VO, 210)*

This we tried to show in our analysis of both Woolf’s layering of narrative voices (polyphony), in the complexity of her web of internal correspondences (thematic transformation), and the unity given to the whole narrative by Bernard’s final “summing up”, whose role in the novel corresponds to that of the recapitulation in a sonata-form structure. Music is neither a metaphor nor an analogy for these concepts, it *is* these very concepts in the same way that “fireworks” which “make figures” are not symbols of anything, but are pure simultaneity, complexity and unity: pattern for the sake of pattern, because without pattern, we could not exist in the world’s “vast mass” of undetermined matter.

> Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on & say “This is it?” [...] I have a great & astonishing sense of something there, which is ‘it’ – It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved. *(D3: 62)*

That music reveals this “it” comes from the fact that music is in itself satisfactory because it is pure pattern. As she will say of *Parsifal*:

> it may be that these exalted emotions, which belong to the essence of our being, and are rarely expressed, are those that are best translated by music; so that a satisfaction, or
whatever one may call that sense of answer which the finest art supplies to its own question, is constantly conveyed here. [...] *Parsifal* seems poured out in a smooth stream at white heat; its shape is solid and entire. (*E1* 290)

In the beginning was not the word, in the beginning was music as the children’s voices waking in the nursery reached out of their silence to express the “the little fierce beat—tick-tack, tick-tack—of the pulse of one’s mind” (W, 183), which Woolf metaphorically compares to a wave forever breaking on the shore of language:

Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it. (*L3* 247)

Peeling off the layers of “civilization” which had “pressed” harmony and rhythm, “like dried flowers, into the neatly divided scales, the tones and semitones of the pianoforte” (*E1* 30), and thus tracing its origins back to the savages who “knocked two bars of iron together and heard in that clangour the foretaste of the music of Mozart” (*E4*, 348), Virginia Woolf thus distils music to its very essence, our own rhythmical essence. As we argued in Chapter 5, rhythm is fundamentally repetition and repetition leads to pattern:

The beat of rhythm in the mind is akin to the beat of the pulse in the body; and thus though many are deaf to tune hardly any one is so coarsely organised as not to hear the rhythm of its own heart in words and music and movement. It is because it is thus inborn in us that we can never silence music, any more than we can stop our heart from beating; and it is for this reason too that music is so universal and has the strange and illimitable power of a natural force. (*Street Music*, *E1* 30)

Is this what Woolf meant when nearly 35 years later, she cryptically wrote “we are the words, we are the music, we are the thing itself” (*MB*, 72)? Virginia Woolf was forever searching for the essence of life, the “thing itself” lying not in reality as we know it, in the objects and actions, colours and sounds - the subject-matter of so many so-called “realistic” novels-, but in the miracle of our own consciousness – the sense
"that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of a work of art" (MB, 72). For Woolf, the essence of life is in our consciousness of a perpetual discovery of those ever-shifting patterns which music so perfectly encapsulates. Virginia Woolf uses music to connect the many details of the complexity of our experience in order to give us an alternative vision of life itself, one in which detail is extinguished and we are made to hear the "singing of the real world".

Our investigation led us from what, at first, appeared to be a relatively simple question, i.e. how literature and music intersect in the novels of Virginia Woolf, to the more complex issue of the potential ontological and phenomenological significance of the musical paradigm. One last word must be said as to the musical or musicological significance of our study. Even though we approached music at a diagonal through the eyes of an author, with the specific literary concerns of an author, we paradoxically brought to light what we think is a fundamental aspect of musical meaning which could be explored in far more depth in a further study, one which has never been proposed in the past or current musicological or philosophical fields, though one towards which we perceive many aestheticians are gradually working towards. The musical significance of the overarching aesthetic principles we outlined in our analysis of The Waves and Mrs Dalloway is indeed not to be underestimated as we find that they reveal what makes music music, and furthermore, what makes music aesthetically paradigmatical, as we showed in our study of Woolf's musicality. These principles are neither gratuitously associated with music, nor are they totally musically hermetic. Neither are they aesthetic values as such though they do reveal how music may be valuable.
APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Visual music – the musical paradigm in début du siècle painting, an overview

Figure 34. Wassily Kandisky, Untitled (First Abstract Watercolor). 1910.¹

For the Modernist artists, the arts, and literature most of all, are not isolated phenomena but take on board methods and techniques from all the other arts. Even more than painting, far too spatial and static (and in the first few years of the twentieth century, still broadly “representative”²), music was becoming, at the start of the Modernist era, a model for authors and painters because it seemed to them that it was of all the forms of artistic expression that which best expressed the essence of the life of the mind, pure consciousness, which so fascinated them at that time, and was a medium which potentially could bridge the gap between reality and the imagination, the artist’s vision and the corresponding vision conjured up by “the eye of the mind” (‘The Faery Queen’, CE1:14) in the imagination of the listener, the reader or the viewer.

¹ Pencil, watercolor and ink on paper, 49.6 x 64.8 cm. Paris, Musée National Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, France, online: http://www.russianavantgard.com.
Strangely enough, it is noticeable that most often, Virginia Woolf's own interest in music and the other arts is obscured by discussions which focus exclusively on the pictural aspect of her style, studies which rely more on the fact that the visual arts were an undeniable defining feature of the Bloomsbury society and the fact that Woolf's close family and friends were painters in their own rights than on the potential specifically "pictural" aspects of Woolf's actual style and aesthetics. As Diane Gillespie will say, "Woolf's forays into the visual arts have long been recognized. Most discussions, like those of J.K. Johnstone, Allen McLaurin, and many writers on To the Lighthouse, focus on the influence on Woolf's work of painter and critic Roger Fry." It is therefore not surprising if studies on Virginia Woolf and painting (or even photography) dominate the critical literature and those on Virginia Woolf and music are extremely scant. But these studies fail to take into account the attraction music held for Virginia Woolf. In such a way, in a critique on Maclaurin's The Echoes Enslaved, Lillian D. Bloom argues that despite his analysis of Woolf's interest in post-impressionist painting and its influence on her work, Maclaurin has unforgivably overlooked her interest in music which is one of the essential features of her style:

[Maclaurin] should have acknowledged that she was interested not only in painting but music as well. Her fiction exhibits an overriding concern with design, accents, and patterns, that is with music and painting.

Furthermore, the studies which focus on her pictural style tend to overlook the fact that twentieth century painting itself had turned to music as a model of artistic expression. I would thus go as far as to argue that the purely "pictural" or "visual" in Woolf's works, cannot be understood without any reference to music and those musical properties which go beyond what is essentially visually static and representative into the abstract movement and motion conveyed exclusively by the musical model and which the discursive nature of language and literature can be seen

---

3 The painters, her sister Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell. (cf. http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsburyhtml/group.htm for overview of the members of the Bloomsbury group).
4 See Diane Gillespie, 'Introduction' in Gillespie (ed.), op.cit., p. 4.
5 Lillian D. Bloom, op.cit., p. 263.
6 cf. also articles on Woolf's interest in the cinema, and the Russian ballets in Diane Gillespie, op.cit., p. 7.
to parallel, though not without some major differences, as we shall see below. Innumerable Modernist artists will refer to the musical model in a way which would actually affect the concrete structural and aesthetic modalities of their own material. In 1914, the art critic Clive Bell, a family friend who had been married to Virginia Woolf's sister Vanessa since 1907, highlighted the musical qualities of modern painting, saying that

We have ceased to ask 'What does this picture represent', and ask instead, 'What does it make us feel?' We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than a coloured photograph.7

Gauguin, in particular, will say of his paintings that they "express no idea directly, but they should make you think as music does, without the help of ideas and images, simply by the mysterious relationships existing between our brains and such arrangements of colours and lines"8 and Whistler articulated his own aesthetics by reverting to a similar metaphor in relation to his own art:

Nature contains the elements of colour and form of all pictures - as the keyboard contains the notes of all music - but the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful - as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos, glorious harmony. To say to the painter, that nature is to be taken, as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano!9

Kandinsky's interest in music is particularly well-known and documented. For him, "colour is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with its many chords. The artist is the hand that, by touching this or that key, sets the soul vibrating automatically".10 In Concerning the Spiritual in Art in particular, published the same

---

year as he painted his first abstract watercolour (see Figure 34 above) as well as many musically inspired “compositions” or “improvisations”, as he termed them, Kandinsky reveals his admiration for Schoenberg’s music in his Chapter 3, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’ and his thoughts on the musical paradigm in his Chapter 4, ‘The Pyramid’:

And so at different points along the road are the different arts, saying what they are best able to say, and in the language which is peculiarly their own. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, the differences between them, there has never been a time when the arts approached each other more nearly than they do today, in this later phase of spiritual development.

In each manifestation is the seed of a striving towards the abstract, the non-material. Consciously or unconsciously they are obeying Socrates’ command--Know thyself. Consciously or unconsciously artists are studying and proving their material, setting in the balance the spiritual value of those elements, with which it is their several privilege to work.

And the natural result of this striving is that the various arts are drawing together. They are finding in Music the best teacher. With few exceptions music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist's soul, in musical sound.

A painter, who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end.  

Such examples of the turn towards music abound. As Roger Fry will point out, that music expressed an “inner” life was not original -- but what was original was the way music became at the turn of the century a model for the other arts because of this perceived affinity with certain aspects of human consciousness:

A new ambition, a new conception of the purpose and methods of painting, are gradually emerging; a new hope too, and a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has for long been relegated to music and poetry.  

11 online: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/cnspr10.txt
12 Roger Fry, “Introductory Note to Maurice Denis, ‘Cezanne’”, op.cit., p. 76.
The difficulty with the "visual" aspect of life, the subject matter of the novelist, was acutely noted by Virginia Woolf and was put down to the insidious habit we have in "seeing" things visually. In a diary entry of 1929, Woolf will reflect on the way some thoughts and ideas escape any visual definition:

I see through everything. Perhaps the image ought to have been one that gives an idea of a stream becoming thin: of seeing to the bottom. Lytton once said, - I connect it with a visit to Kew Gardens - that we can only live if we see through illusion. [...] (it is odd by the way how, how small a thought is which one cannot express pictorially, as one has been accustomed to thinking it: this saying of Lytton's has always come pictorially, with heat, flowers, grass, summer, & myself walking at Kew). (D3: 233)

By "illusion", Woolf is here referring to the illusion of "life", the business of doing things and seeing people: "I must make human illusion - ask someone in tomorrow after dinner; & begin that astonishing adventure with the souls of others again - about which I know so little" (D3: 234). Seeing to the bottom, for Virginia Woolf, is getting closer to the truth "I feel that if I sink further I shall reach the truth." (D3: 235)
Appendix 2: ‘The String Quartet’, complete text with structural outline

1. Pre-concert “orts, scraps and fragments”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well, here we are, and if you cast your eye over the room you will see that Tubes and trams and omnibuses, private carriages not a few, even, I venture to believe, landaus with bays in them, have been busy at it, weaving threads from one end of London to the other. Yet I begin to have my doubts— If indeed it’s true, as they’re saying, that Regent Street is up, and the Treaty signed, and the weather not cold for the time of year, and even at that rent not a flat to be had, and the worst of influenza its after effects; if I bethink me of having forgotten to write about the leak in the larder, and left my glove in the train; if the ties of blood require me, leaning forward, to accept cordially the hand which is perhaps offered hesitatingly— “Seven years since we met!” “The last time in Venice.” “And where are you living now?” “Well, the late afternoon suits me the best, though, if it weren’t asking too much —” “But I knew you at once!” “Still, the war made a break—” If the mind’s shot through by such little arrows, and—for human society compels it—no sooner is one launched than another presses forward; if this engenders heat and in addition they’ve turned on the electric light; if saying one thing does, in so many cases, leave behind it a need to improve and revise, stirring besides regrets, pleasures, vanities, and desires — if it’s all the facts I mean, and the hats, the fur boas, the gentlemen’s swallow-tail coats, and pearl tie–pins that come to the surface — what chance is there? Of what? It becomes every minute more difficult to say why, in spite of everything, I sit here believing I can’t now say what, or even remember the last time it happened. “Did you see the procession?” “The King looked cold.” “No, no, no. But what was it?” “She’s bought a house at Malmesbury.” “How lucky to find one!” On the contrary, it seems to me pretty sure that she, whoever she may be, is damned, since it’s all a matter of flats and hats and sea gulls, or so it seems to be for a hundred people sitting here well dressed, walled in, furred, replete. Not that I can boast, since I too sit passive on a gilt chair, only turning the earth above a buried memory, as we all do, for there are signs, if I’m not mistaken, that we’re all recalling something, furtively seeking something. Why fidget? Why so anxious about the sit of cloaks; and gloves—whether to button or unbutton? Then watch that elderly face against the dark canvas, a moment ago urbane and flushed; now taciturn and sad, as if in shadow. Was it the sound of the second violin tuning in the ante–room? Here they come; four black figures, carrying...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Flourish, spring, burgeon, burst! The pear tree on the top of the mountain. Fountains jet; drops descend. But the waters of the Rhone flow swift and deep, race under the arches, and sweep the trailing water leaves, washing shadows over the silver fish, the spotted fish rushed down by the swift waters, now swept into an eddy where — it's difficult this — conglomeration of fish all in a pool; leaping, splashing, scraping sharp fins; and such a boil of current that the yellow pebbles are churned round and round, round and round — free now, rushing downwards, or even somehow ascending in exquisite spirals into the air; curled like thin shavings from under a plane; up and up . . . How lovely goodness is in those who, stepping lightly, go smiling through the world! Also in jolly old fishwives, squatted under arches, obscene old women, how deeply they laugh and shake and rollick, when they walk, from side to side, hum, hah!

"That's an early Mozart, of course —"
"But the tune, like all his tunes, makes one despair — I mean hope. What do I mean? That's the worst of music! I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine. Or an indecent story, now — I could relish that. The older one grows the more one likes indecency. Hall, hah! I'm laughing. What at? You said nothing, nor did the old gentleman opposite . . . But suppose — suppose — Hush!"

The melancholy river bears us on. When the moon comes through the trailing willow boughs, I see your face, I hear your voice and the bird singing as we pass the osier bed. What are you whispering? Sorrow, sorrow, joy, joy. Woven together, like reeds in moonlight. Woven together, inextricably commingled, bound in pain and strewn in sorrow — crash!

The boat sinks. Rising, the figures ascend, but now leaf thin, tapering to a dusky wraith, which, fiery tipped, draws its twofold passion from my heart. For me it sings, unseals my sorrow, thaws compassion, floods with love the sunless world, nor, ceasing, abates its tenderness but deftly, subtly, weaves in and out until in this pattern, this consummation, the cleft ones unify; soar, sob, sink to rest, sorrow and joy.

Why then grieve? Ask what? Remain unsatisfied? I say all's been settled; yes; laid to rest under a coverlet of rose leaves, falling. Falling. Ah, but they cease. One rose leaf, falling from an enormous height, like a little parachute dropped from an invisible balloon, turns, flutters waveringly. It won't reach us.
**2nd Break**

“No, no. I noticed nothing. That’s the worst of music — these silly dreams. The second violin was late, you say?”

“There’s old Mrs. Munro, feeling her way out — blinder each year, poor woman—on this slippery floor.”

Eyeless old age, grey-headed Sphinx. . . There she stands on the pavement, beckoning, so sternly, the red omnibus.

“How lovely! How well they play! How — how — how!”

The tongue is but a clapper. Simplicity itself. The feathers in the hat next me are bright and pleasing as a child’s rattle. The leaf on the plane-tree flashes green through the chink in the curtain. Very strange, very exciting.

“How — how — how!” Hush!

---

**3rd Break**

These are the lovers on the grass.

“If, madam, you will take my hand—”

“Sir, I would trust you with my heart. Moreover, we have left our bodies in the banqueting hall. Those on the turf are the shadows of our souls.”

“Then these are the embraces of our souls.” The lemons nod assent. The swan pushes from the bank and floats dreaming into mid stream.

“But to return. He followed me down the corridor, and, as we turned the corner, trod on the lace of my petticoat. What could I do but cry ‘Ah!’ and stop to finger it? At which he drew his sword, made passes as if he were stabbing something to death, and cried, ‘Mad! Mad! Mad!’ Whereupon I screamed, and the Prince, who was writing in the large vellum book in the oriel window, came out in his velvet skull-cap and furred slippers, snatched a rapier from the wall — the King of Spain’s gift, you know—on which I escaped, flinging on this cloak to hide the ravages to my skirt — to hide. . . But listen! the horns!”

The gentleman replies so fast to the lady, and she runs up the scale with such witty exchange of compliment now culminating in a sob of passion, that the words are indistinguishable though the meaning is plain enough — love, laughter, flight, pursuit, celestial bliss — all floated out on the gayest ripple of tender endearment — until the sound of the silver horns, at first far distant, gradually sounds more and more distinctly, as if seneschals were saluting the dawn or proclaiming ominously the escape of the lovers. . . The green garden, moonlit pool, lemons, lovers, and fish are all dissolved in the opal sky, across which, as the horns are joined by trumpets and supported by clarions there rise white arches firmly planted on marble pillars...
4th Movement or Coda

4th Dream-sequence

Tramp and trumpeting. Clang and clangour. Firm establishment. Fast foundations. March of myriads. Confusion and chaos trod to earth. But this city to which we travel has neither stone nor marble; hangs enduring; stands unshakable; nor does a face, nor does a flag greet or welcome. Leave then to perish your hope; droop in the desert my joy; naked advance. Bare are the pillars; auspicious to none; casting no shade; resplendent; severe. Back then I fall, eager no more, desiring only to go, find the street, mark the buildings, greet the applewoman, say to the maid who opens the door: A starry night.

3. End of Performance

“Good night, good night. You go this way?”

“Alas. I go that.”
Appendix 3: Extract from James Joyce's 'The Dead' (Dubliners)

Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed drawing-room. He liked music but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners, though they had begged Mary Jane to play something. Four young men, who had come from the refreshment-room to stand in the doorway at the sound of the piano, had gone away quietly in couples after a few minutes. The only persons who seemed to follow the music were Mary Jane herself, her hands racing along the key-board or lifted from it at the pauses like those of a priestess in momentary imprecation, and Aunt Kate standing at her elbow to turn the page.

Gabriel's eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower which Aunt Julia had worked in red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been taught for one year. His mother had worked for him as a birthday present a waistcoat of purple cabinet, with little foxes' heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons. It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family. Both she and Julia had always seemed a little proud of their serious and matronly sister. Her photograph stood before the pierglass. She held an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the name of her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate in Balbrigan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembers her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown.

He knew that Mary Jane must be near the end of her piece for she was playing again the opening melody with runs of scales after every bar and while he waited for the end the resentment died down in his heart. The piece ended with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass. Great applause greeted Mary Jane as, blushing and rolling up her music nervously, she escaped from the room. The most vigorous clapping came from the
four young men in the doorway who had gone away to the refreshment-room at the beginning of the piece but had come back when the piano had stopped."

Clara Bergmann followed. Miriam watched her as she took her place at the piano—how square and stout she looked and old, careworn, like a woman of forty. She had high square shoulders and high square hips—her brow was low and her face thin and broad and flat. Her eyes were like the eyes of a dog and her thin-lipped mouth long and straight until it went steadily down at the corners. She wore a large fringe like Harriett's—and a thin coil of hair filled the nape of her neck. She played, without music, her face lifted boldly. The notes rang out in a prelude of unfinished phrases—the kind, Miriam noted, that had so annoyed her father in what he called new-fangled music—she felt it was going to be a brilliant piece—fireworks—execution—style—and sat up self-consciously and fixed her eyes on Clara's hands. "Can you see the hands?" she remembered having heard someone say at a concert. How easily they moved. Clara still sat back, her face raised to the light. The notes rang out like trumpet-calls as her hands dropped with an easy fling and sprang back and dropped again. What loose wrists she must have, thought Miriam. The clarion notes ceased. There was a pause. Clara threw back her head, a faint smile flickered over her face, her hands fell gently and the music came again, pianissimo, swinging in an even rhythm. It flowed from those clever hands, a half-indicated theme with a gentle, steady, throbbing undertow. Miriam dropped her eyes—she seemed to have been listening long—that wonderful light was coming again—she had forgotten her sewing—when presently she saw, slowly circling, fading and clearing, first its edge, and then, for a moment the whole thing, dripping, dripping as it circled, a weed-grown mill-wheel. . . . She recognised it instantly. She had seen it somewhere as a child—in Devonshire—and never thought of it since—and there it was. She heard the soft swish and drip of the water and the low humming of the wheel. How beautiful . . . it was fading. . . . She held it—it returned—clearer this time and she could feel the cool breeze it made, and sniff the fresh earthy scent of it, the scent of the moss and the weeds shining and dripping on its huge rim. Her heart filled. She felt a little tremor in her throat. All at once she knew that if she went on listening to that humming wheel and feeling the freshness of the air, she would cry. She pulled herself together, and for a while saw only a vague radiance in the room and the dim forms grouped about. She could not remember which was which. All seemed good and dear to her. The trumpet notes had come back, and in a few moments the music ceased. . . . Someone was closing the great doors from inside the schoolroom.
For the Andante had begun - very beautiful, but bearing a family likeness to all the other beautiful Andantes that Beethoven had written, and, to Helen's mind, rather disconnecting the heroes and shipwrecks of the first movement from the heroes and goblins of the third. She heard the tune through once, and then her attention wandered, and she gazed at the audience, or the organ, or the architecture. Much did she censure the attenuated Cupids who encircle the ceiling of the Queen's Hall, inclining each to each with vapid gesture, and clad in sallow pantaloons, on which the October sunlight struck. "How awful to marry a man like those Cupids!" thought Helen. Here Beethoven started decorating his tune, so she heard him through once more, and then she smiled at her cousin Frieda. But Frieda, listening to Classical Music, could not respond. Herr Liesecke, too, looked as if wild horses could not make him inattentive; there were lines across his forehead, his lips were parted, his pince-nez at right angles to his nose, and he had laid a thick, white hand on either knee. And next to her was Aunt Juley, so British, and wanting to tap. How interesting that row of people was! What diverse influences had gone to the making! Here Beethoven, after humming and hawing with great sweetness, said "Heigho," and the Andante came to an end. Applause, and a round of "wunderschönung" and "prachtvolleying" from the German contingent. Margaret started talking to her new young man; Helen said to her aunt: "Now comes the wonderful movement: first of all the goblins, and then a trio of elephants dancing;" and Tibby implored the company generally to look out for the transitional passage on the drum.

"On the what, dear?"

"On the drum, Aunt Juley."

"No; look out for the part where you think you have done with the goblins and they come back," breathed Helen, as the music started with a goblin walking quietly over the universe, from end to end. Others followed him. They were not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them so terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world. After the interlude of elephants dancing, they returned and made the observation for the second time. Helen could not contradict them, for, once at all events, she had felt the same, and had seen the reliable walls of youth collapse. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right. Her brother raised his finger: it was the transitional passage on the drum. For, as if things were going too far, Beethoven took hold of the goblins and made them do what he wanted. He appeared in person. He gave them a little push, and they began to walk
in major key instead of in a minor, and then—he blew with his mouth and they were scattered! Gusts of splendour, gods and demigods contending with vast swords, colour and fragrance broadcast on the field of battle, magnificent victory, magnificent death! Oh, it all burst before the girl, and she even stretched out her gloved hands as if it was tangible. Any fate was titanic; any contest desirable; conqueror and conquered would alike be applauded by the angels of the utmost stars.

And the goblins—they had not really been there at all? They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief? One healthy human impulse would dispel them? Men like the Wilcoxes, or President Roosevelt, would say yes. Beethoven knew better. The goblins really had been there. They might return—and they did. It was as if the splendour of life might boil over—and waste to steam and froth. In its dissolution one heard the terrible, ominous note, and a goblin, with increased malignity, walked quietly over the universe from end to end. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! Even the flaming ramparts of the world might fall.

Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely, and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things.

Helen pushed her way out during the applause. She desired to be alone. The music summed up to her all that had happened or could happen in her career. She read it as a tangible statement, which could never be superseded. The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning. She pushed right out of the building, and walked slowly down the outside staircase, breathing the autumnal air, and then she strolled home.

Appendix 6: The ‘stream of consciousness’, an overview

Water is a very strong metaphor within the context of what is usually, but not unproblematically, termed “stream of consciousness” literature, an expression coined first in the psychological domain by one of the first American psychologists William James, the brother of the renowned novelist Henry James, even though the link between the “flow” of the mind and the metaphor of the river was actually widespread in the Romantic consciousness.13 We do not have the space to go into much detail of either the psychological aspect of the matter nor of the relations between William James’ and Virginia Woolf’s approach to the consciousness. As the notion of water is central to the narrator’s musical dream-sequences, a few words concerning the origins, meanings and limitations of the notion of “stream” of consciousness should suffice at this point to clear the ground.

The “stream of consciousness” metaphor, alluring and evocative though it is, is not without its problems.14 In fact, there have been many alternative expressions used to describe the consciousness, as we shall see below, which reveal the difficulty which psychologists and artists at the turn of the century had in describing the mental processes. None of these terms were to prove entirely satisfactory as they were usually self-exclusive.

As an image, the metaphor of “stream” certainly conjures up certain notions of continuity or flow of thought, what Bowling will describe as the “meanderings of the

---

13 In the Dictionary of Literary Symbols, Michael Ferber refers in particular to Wordsworth (“the river of my mind” in Prelude, 2.214), Shelley (the “stream of thought” in Alastor 644, cf. also “Mont Blanc”). Ferber also quotes Dante (the “river of the mind”, cf. Purgatorio 13.90). Also a metaphor for eloquence, images such as the “river of speech” occur in Horace, Cicero, etc., op.cit., pp. 172-173.

14 The expression “stream of consciousness” is thought to be applied far too loosely and indiscriminately. Lawrence Bowling, for instance, will argue that “the critics have failed to recognize different variations within the stream of consciousness technique, and they have failed also to distinguish this technique from another similar method [the interior monologue] with which it is often confused” (Lawrence E. Bowling. ‘What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?’ PMLA, Vol. 65, No. 4., June 1950, p. 341). We cannot go into the intricacies surrounding the proper use of the expression “stream of consciousness” in relation to “interior monologue” – suffice to say however that we consider interior monologue as being a type or subcategory of stream of consciousness narrative. As Shirley Rose will say, the term “stream of consciousness” today serves critical convenience [...]. Nevertheless, as a metaphorical conception, it carries the full impact of an implicit comparison, which when associated with a work says that the work has, as its basis, a view compatible with the metaphor.” (Shirley Rose, op.cit., p. 368). Taking into account the style and the imagery of the narrator’s dream-sequences, this is certainly the case in Virginia Woolf’s ‘The String Quartet’.

425
mind". In his *Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, William James will metaphorically describe the consciousness as a flowing river as he understands it first and foremost as being something fluid, thoughts not being attached to one another in a logical and clearly delineated way but overlapping and blending together:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*

Interestingly, Virginia Woolf herself placed running water at the centre of her own understanding of life and consciousness. For Virginia Woolf, the metaphor of water evokes the notion of continuity. In a letter to Clive Bell, Woolf will reject his criticism of the draft of the opening chapters of her first novel, then tentatively entitled “Melymbrosia” (*The Voyage Out*), and invoke the analogy of “running water” to described the fluidity of style she wished to achieve:

When I read the thing over (one very grey evening) I thought it so flat and monotonous that I did not even feel ‘the atmosphere’: certainly there was no character in it. Next morning I proceeded to slash and rewrite, in the hope of animating it; and (as I suspect for I have not re-read it) destroyed the one virtue it had – a sort of continuity; for I wrote it originally in a dream like state, which was at any rate, unbroken. My intention is to write straight on, and finish the book; and then, if that day ever comes, to catch if possible the first imagination and go over the beginning again with broad touches, keeping much of the original draft, and trying to deepen the atmosphere – giving the feel of running water, and not much else. (L1:382-383)

For William James it is precisely the importance of this notion of *flowing* water which is at the core of his understanding of consciousness itself:

---

The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartpotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook.17

Echoing these words, Woolf will see herself in ‘A Sketch of the Past’, as “a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream” (MB, 80) - surrounded by the flow of water, held in place by the incredible power which external influences have on each one of us, describing them as “these invisible presences” which bind us “from the first moment of consciousness to other people” and “tugs” us backwards and forwards, catching us within their spheres of influence.18 But the metaphor of the stream – and this is its major drawback - only reflects a certain specific aspect of the way the Modernists saw the consciousness to function, i.e. the linear fusion of thoughts within a discursive, hence temporal dimension. Returning to the metaphor of running water, James will go one step further and highlight the way the stream of the consciousness interacts with the static “images” which also form part of our thoughts, those pails and pots which stand mid-stream, thus revealing the difficulty of describing the consciousness, like Virginia Woolf just said (i.e. she “cannot describe the stream”) – something which is both fluid and static at times:

Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it, - or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh; leaving it, it is true, an image of the same thing it was before, but making it an image of that thing newly taken and freshly understood.

Let us call the consciousness of this halo of relations around the image by the name of “psychic overtone” or “fringe”.19

17 ibid.
18 It is only by analysing these “invisible presences” that a writer may truly grasp the essence of his subject, “the most important” - those “instincts, affections, passions, attachments” which are so often left out when we try and describe people’s existence. (cf. ‘A sketch of the Past’, MB: 79-80)
19 William James, Psychology, Briefer Course, op.cit., p. 151.
From the stream, we have now progressed to the more static metaphor of halo or fringe. In the same way, in a seminal and oft-quoted passage of her essay ‘Modern Fiction’, Virginia Woolf will also use this image of halo:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. (‘Modern Fiction’ (1925), in E4:160-161)

However, our interconnected experiences are also seen to evolve and expand within the flow of the stream of consciousness, thus bringing into play an additional atemporal dimension. By noticing in his Psychology: Briefer Course, the capacity of our consciousness to have both a fluid and a static nature, he will differentiate between “substantive” and “transitive” states of mind:

When we take a general view of the wonderful stream of our consciousness, what strikes us first is the different pace of its parts. Like a bird’s life, it seems to be an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this, where every thought is expressed in a sentence, and every sentence closed by a period. The resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is that they can be held before the mind for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing; the places of flight are filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest.20

In such a way, the consciousness is thus perceived as both something fluid and temporal, hence the metaphor of the stream, and something static and atemporal, hence the metaphors of web, chambers or halo, i.e. something which progresses both horizontally in time and vertically in space. Though the expression “stream of consciousness” was first applied in its literary sense by May Sinclair to her novel Pilgrimage in April 1918,21 Dorothy Richardson rejected it, preferring “interior

20 ibid., p. 146.
21 The first stream of consciousness novel is however said to be Les Lauriers sont Coupés, by Edouard Dujardin, written in 1888. Virginia and Leonard Woolf possessed in their private library William James’s Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine (Ingersoll Lecture, Harvard University, 1898) and The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy. (New York; London; Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1897), cf.:
monologue" precisely because for her, the consciousness is not only linear but also something stable which expands vertically rather than flows horizontally, which has spatial depth as well as temporal linearity. For Dorothy Richardson however, consciousness is something stable and immutable, the "being", around which revolves the superficial linear sequential details of life:

Stream of consciousness is a muddle-headed phrase. It's not a stream, it's a pool, a sea, an ocean. It has depth and greater depth and when you think you have reached its bottom there is nothing there, and when you give yourself up to one current you are suddenly possessed by another.22

http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/holland/mase/OnlineBooks/woolflibrary/woolflibraryonline.htm

### Appendix 7: Chronology of the writing of *The Waves*

*Table compiled from VW’s diary and J.W. Graham (trans. and ed.), Virginia Woolf – The Waves – The Two Holograph Drafts, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976, pp. 29 and 38*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Versions</th>
<th>Date begun (VW)</th>
<th>Date begun (Graham)</th>
<th>Date finished (VW)</th>
<th>Date finished (Graham)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Preliminary sketch</td>
<td>18 June 1927</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft I</td>
<td>10 September 1929</td>
<td>2 July 1929</td>
<td>10 April 1930</td>
<td>29 April 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typescript 1</td>
<td>typescript of Draft I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft II</td>
<td>1 May 1930</td>
<td>13 June 1930</td>
<td>7 February 1931</td>
<td>7 February 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typescript 2</td>
<td>typescript of Draft II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typescript 3</td>
<td>retyping of Typescript 2</td>
<td>5 May 1931</td>
<td>22 June 1931</td>
<td>22 June 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typescript 4</td>
<td>retyping of Typescript 3 by a professional</td>
<td>25 June 1931</td>
<td>18 July 1931</td>
<td>17 July 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction of Proofs</td>
<td>10 August 1931</td>
<td></td>
<td>17 August 1931</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Summary of intermedial correspondances between Beethoven, quartet op. 130/133 and *The Waves* according to Clements (2005)

(page numbers in brackets in table below correspond to references to Clements, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beethoven, string quartet op. 130/133</th>
<th>corresponding characters in <em>The Waves</em></th>
<th>thematic points of intersection</th>
<th>formal points of intersection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>music</td>
<td>literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st mvt</td>
<td>Neville (Clements, pp. 168-169)</td>
<td>• subversion of musical conventions thwarting expectations</td>
<td>• subversion of his otherwise conventional, orderly attitude to life in his love for Percival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adagio ma non troppo</td>
<td></td>
<td>• extremes (fast/slow, unison/couterpoint, calm/agitato, etc.)</td>
<td>• described as both “outside” (showing a socially acceptable pose) and “inside” (his true feelings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>• bi-thematic sonata-form</td>
<td>• serves to highlight the AB structure of Bernard’s literary methods (i.e. phrases which he jots down under A or B in his notebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd mvt</td>
<td>Louis (ibid, pp. 169-170)</td>
<td>• three-note “stomping” motif</td>
<td>• Louis’s stamping beast “refrain”, “It stamps, it stamps, it stamps” (<em>W</em>, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presto</td>
<td></td>
<td>• brooding character of intensified three-note motif in trio-section, “extremes of severity and concentration”</td>
<td>• The stamping refrain comes to symbolize Louis’s dissatisfaction with life and his suffering and his resolution to “conquer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• fast tempo, see-saw motion of melodic and rhythmic material</td>
<td>• fast-paced rhythm, whirl and bustle of the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• ternary 6/4 rhythm of trio section suggestive of waltz rhythm in a tempo too fast to dance to</td>
<td>• eating-house scene described in terms of a “waltz” taken as a model for social interactions which are too fast and frantic for Louis to feel included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Louis feels excluded from society because he speaks with an Australian accent, and thus does not feel integrated in the “central rhythm” of the metropolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Character(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3rd mvt  | Susan        | • bi-thematic sonata-form  
• topos-turvy contrasts (slow/fast; scherzosoldolce; B-flat minor/D major; opposing moods)  
• misleading opening bars  
• thwarts musical expectations (delaying tactics, avoidance of cadential closure)  
• Andante (i.e. “walking”) tempo  
• “assorted” articulations, i.e. pizzicato, staccato, legato | childhood scene  
\(W, 10\)  
“rustic music” scene  
\(W, 122-123\) | none |
| 4th mvt  | Jinny        | • dance (*alla Tedesca*, i.e. in the German manner)  
• Melodies are passed from one voice to another and divided between voices.  
• continuous stream of circular motion given by the repetition of triplet figures in all four voices: “merry-go-round” effect | ballroom scene  
\(W, 73-75\) | none |
| 5th mvt  | Rhoda        | • heart-rending subject-matter; contrasting central “recitative” (*beklemmt*) which mimics a sobbing human voice  
• lyrical and song-like  
• solo voice destabilized by polyphony suggesting “disembodied mood” \(W, 490\) | “music-hall” scene  
\(W, 115-116\)  
string quartet scene  
\(W, 116-117\) | none |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original 6th movement (op. 133)</th>
<th>&quot;Grosse Fuge&quot; Overture: Allegro - Fuga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • emulates operatic aria: instance of Beethoven’s imitative intermediality in which Beethoven imitates vocal utterances | becomes more and more insubstantial and finally commits suicide  
• outside social interactions  
• mimetic nature of the Wigmore Hall passage in which Woolf makes words imitate music (cf. ‘Ah’!) |  
| Bernard (ibid, pp. 174-175) |  
| • radical use of fugal form  
• chromaticism, harmonic and melodic tension – extreme virtuosic leaps  
• avoids resolution and closure, both thematically and technically  
• polyphony  
• self-referential, i.e. uses, develops and expands thematic and harmonic material from the other movements |  
| Final soliloquy-“symphony” of voices (W, 182)  
• Bernard’s final soliloquy emulates the function and position of the ‘Grosse Fuge’  
• cyclical and never-ending motion of the waves (cf. last phrase: “The waves broke on the shore” W, 248)  
• repeats other people’s phrases |  
| op. 130 – 6th movement (ibid, p. 165-166) |  
| Percival |  
| • finale often discarded  
• movement in the conventional style to replace unconventional ‘Grosse Fuge’ |  
| • ‘silent’ character  
• conventionally heroic figure |  
| hunting song scene (W, 177) | none |  

433
The Waves dramatizes the lives of six friends, three girls (Jinny, Susan and Rhoda) and three boys (Bernard, Neville and Louis), from their childhood together, their time at school and university, etc. to their old age or their death. A seventh figure, one of the most enigmatic and influential characters in the novel, Percival, never speaks directly – we only hear about him through the eyes of the other six. His meaningless death half-way through the novel, shattering his friends’ sense of security and identity, will be a turning point in the novel. The originality of the narrative procedure adopted by Virginia Woolf in order to express the parallel lives of her characters is that of an alternance of voices or “dramatic soliloquies”, as she described them in her diary (D3: 312).

Despite the fact that Virginia Woolf had wanted The Waves, at an early stage of her writing, to be a “play-poem”, any stage adaptation of this novel is bound to be a compromise for some and an enlightened “interpretation” for others. The novel itself, though showing signs of being a most promising theatrical production, is a work far removed from the stage which pushes the very boundaries of language and representation. To those who know the book, Katie Mitchell’s production emerges as a very personal and controversial reading of Woolf’s text, owing, we feel, more to Beckett than to Woolf. On leaving the theatre, one cannot help but ask what exactly Mitchell was after. With a cast of 8 actors and a wealth of props, Mitchell set herself the task of transforming the silent, insubstantial, shimmering and mist-edged atmosphere of The Waves into a world of very tangible audible and visible realities. Describing her production as “multi-media” with “live sound effects and real-time video”, Mitchell gives us a fragmented and kaleidoscopic vision of the novel, successfully blurring the boundaries between illusion and reality, play and play-acting, performers and audience, as we are invited to create our own version of the play from her multi-dimensional, multi-focal mise-en-scène.
The first impression is that life is truly full of sound and fury as the actors rush around the stage not only playing their parts, speaking their parts and speaking each others parts, but also having to deal with the sound effects, the visual effects, the lighting, the costumes and accessories thrown on and off over their otherwise neutral black bodices, the props taken from shelves along the sides of the stage and then put back in a hurry and the peculiar angles and complex contortions demanded by the camera-work. The whole novel is thus performed in this manner, unrelentlessly for nearly three whole hours. The idea of fragmenting each scene into a multitude of simultaneous events all mirroring and echoing each other is clever and reflects the novel’s own ambivalent multidimensional narrative. A simple dumb-show is acted out centre-stage around a long table covered in props, filmed “live”, sometimes by several cameras at a time, and projected onto the screen at the back of the stage while all the sounds are produced separately in two corners of the stage with the help of microphones and speakers in synchronization with the miming. Things are constantly reflected, in mirrors, in glass panes, in water and these are blended onto the screen with other superimposed video-shots of yet more reflections. We sometimes see through the mirrors or the glass panes and ghost-like figures appear in the shadows behind the reflections. Each scene is taking place simultaneously on different perceptual levels, our senses thus facing a deconstructed reality in which sound, sight, smell (they all smoke cigarettes) are all wrenched apart.

At one point, Bernard, one of the novel’s characters, is sitting ponderously at the end of the table, facing the audience, and silently eating a slice of bread covered in blood-red strawberry jam in the light of a small lamp. A small brown envelope is propped up on the table against an old wireless set blaring out a light, happy, carefree piece of 1920s jazz. His new-born baby is heard crying in the background. We know that the letter contains the bad news of his friend Percival’s death because a similar scene has already been enacted a few minutes previously. One of the other actors is
shooting this scene through a hand-held video-camera from the side, through a pane of glass held by yet another actor, while a third one is squirting water drops from a bottle onto the glass to simulate rain. Projected “live” onto the screen at the back of the stage, the video is very convincing and looks quite realistic – a man is seen through a window eating his breakfast while the rain patters gently onto the windowpane. The discrepancy between the carefully framed video and the scene acted and shamelessly filmed on the stage is quite striking and as the shot is made from a slightly elevated and diagonal viewpoint which dwarfs Bernard, the distortion is ominous and suggestive. Meanwhile, another actor is standing at the side of the stage, reading out Bernard’s “thoughts”, from a notebook, extracts from Virginia Woolf’s text. As Bernard reaches out for the letter and tears it open, another actor, who had been clinking glasses in front of a microphone in a corner to emulate Bernard’s breakfast noises, starts tearing a piece of paper in synchronization. On the other side of the stage, the next scene is being prepared in the semi-penumbra by the others. The effect of the whole is clever – perhaps too clever. There is such a fine line between signifying too much and signifying nothing. Mitchell so obviously wanted us to think that there is no one true perspective, that what we think is reality in the eye of the beholder, in our own eye as we sit watching actors playing at playing parts on the stage, that there are as many realities as there are beholders, that life is a mosaic of fragments – one of Virginia Woolf’s pet theories:

is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions. This has gone on for ever; will last for ever; goes down to the bottom of the world - this moment I stand on. Also it is transitory, flying, diaphanous. I shall pass like a cloud on the waves. Perhaps it may be that though we change, one flying after another, so quick, so quick, yet we are somehow successive and continuous we human beings, and show the light through. But what is the light? I am impressed by the transitoriness of human life to such an extent that I am often saying a farewell - after dining with Roger for instance; or reckoning how many more times I shall see Nessa. (D3:218, 4 January 1929)

These words were embedded into the performance by Mitchell as she conjured up Virginia Woolf herself onto the stage to read out extracts from her diary and autobiographical writings, in a sort of Brechtian mise en abyme. But we cannot think of anything else as our attention is dispersed and distracted by too much going on at
the same time, our mind struggling to coordinate the disjointed action, the sounds, the visuals, the words and the often self-conscious play-acting. What are we supposed to be seeing? Which is the real performance? Which of the actors is Bernard – the one speaking, the one sitting at the table, both? Sometimes, the actors even interchange their dialogues mid-sentence. We seem not to have been given a play but a rough and ready sketch of a play. Or is it a rehearsal for a film? As a lesson in the art of cinematographic special effects, Mitchell’s production is very informative. But is that the point? Mitchell, like Neville in the novel, would probably retort with scorn:

they want a plot, do they? They want a reason? It is not enough for them, this ordinary scene. It is not enough to wait for the thing to be said as if it were written; to see the sentence lay its dab of clay precisely on the right place, making character; to perceive, suddenly, some group in outline against the sky. Yet if they want violence, I have seen death and murder and suicide all in one room. One comes in, one goes out. There are sobs on the staircase. I have heard threads broken and knots tied and the quiet stitching of white cambric going on and on on the knees of a woman. Why ask, like Louis, for a reason, or fly like Rhoda to some far grove and part the leaves of the laurels and look for statues? (W)

And yet, despite the complexity of its conception and the density of its expression, Mitchell’s mise-en-scène hardly seems enough as she fails to capture the elusive musical “effect of the whole” which Virginia Woolf was after in her novel, and unlike the performance in Between the Acts, Woolf’s last novel, no thunderstorm materializes in the National Theatre to transcend the many details and for one moment perhaps unite the ors, scraps and fragments of our miserably superficial world. Only a technical hitch in the first half which broke the illusion as the sound system failed and a technician had to apologize for the interruption. Strangely enough, in retrospect, we ask ourselves whether this was not also part of the play? From start to end, the play is a mass of fragments. The ending is perhaps the most controversial element in Mitchell’s interpretation of the novel. Finding Bernard’s final soliloquy redundant, she simply cut it out, along with the final image of waves breaking on the shore which Woolf added so as to make a “conclusion”. Instead, each character is seen individually on stage for a few seconds under a bright spotlight, looking miserable and depressed, doubled as usual by the camera-shots. And that’s it.
If anything, Mitchell’s play is about death. Obviously, some aspects of the novel are necessarily emphasized in a staged production of a novel while others are completely obliterated by the severe editing of the text, 200 pages or so cut down to a mere 40 to fit into a single performance. The result is unfortunately rather one-sided. We are admirably and rather obstinately given many perspectives but sadly only one point of view. We quickly get the point and the play becomes repetitive, the effects monotonous and even annoying at times especially when the cameramen’s backs hide what’s going on on the stage as they stand in front of the scene filming it. Mitchell’s interpretation appears all the poorer, in particular as the emphasis is put on creating a chilling, sickly and oppressive atmosphere of impending death and annihilation which overwhelms the performance. Over and again are we shown with vivid realistic detail the corpse of the unknown man found with his throat cut, his blood oozing into the gutter, Rhoda’s pale and bloated face, floating upside down in a basin, blood dripping from a mutilated hand, eddying slowly into the clear water of a white washbasin. Mitchell’s reading of the novel has extracted and simplified the complex web of internal correspondence which Woolf wove into the novel and her production cannot help but provoke us into searching for a reason for all her choices, the whole production being pervaded by a messy and rather simplistic type of symbolism. Red blood, red carnation, red strawberry jam...
BIBLIOGRAPHY

N.B. The format of the bibliography has been dictated by the interdisciplinary nature of our investigation and includes all texts quoted, consulted and read revolving round the subject. For the sake of clarity, as this thesis touches upon both literary and musicological aspects of Woolf's aesthetics, we have established a hierarchy amongst works referenced in order to clearly delineate works by Virginia Woolf, works pertaining specifically to Virginia Woolf and all other works, including those of a more general interdisciplinary nature.

The texts followed by an asterisk '*' indicate that the article is available online on the online journal JSTOR database at http://www.jstor.org.

The "accessed date" for websites is between square brackets.
Primary sources: works by Virginia Woolf

1) Fiction, biography, essays

(\textit{the dates given between brackets correspond to the first publication} – for a complete bibliography of \textit{Woolf}'s works, please refer to \textit{B.J. Kirkpatrick, A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.})


\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Night and Day} (1919), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Jacob's Room} (1922), London: The Hogarth Press, 1947.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Mrs Dalloway} (1925), London: Chatto & Windus, 1947.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{To The Lighthouse} (1927), London: The Hogarth Press, 1946.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{A Room of One's Own} (1929), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Orlando} (1928), London: The Hogarth Press, 1960.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{The Waves} (1931), London: The Hogarth Press, 1980.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Flush, a biography} (1933), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{The Years} (1937), London: The Hogarth Press, 1958.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Three Guineas} (1938), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Roger Fry - A Biography} (1940), Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{Between the Acts} (1941), London: The Hogarth Press, 1960.

\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{The Waves - The two holograph drafts}, transcribed and edited by J. W. Graham. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976.


\hspace{1cm} ______. \textit{The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction}, David Bradshaw (ed.), Oxford University Press, 2001.

2) Diaries, letters, collected essays

\textbf{A - Diaries}


B – Collected letters


C – Essays

_____. ‘Words Fail Me’, BBC Broadcast, 29 April 1937, online on BBC 4: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/audiointerviews/profilepages/woolfv1.shtml
[22 February 2007]
D – Miscellaneous

Woolf, Virginia. Monks House Papers, online catalogue of the manuscripts, proofs, letters, press-cuttings held at the University of Sussex library:
www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_catalogues/monks.html [22 February 2007]

Secondary sources

1) Works pertaining to Virginia Woolf


Argento, Dominick, From the Diary of Virginia Woolf (for medium voice and piano), New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1975.


Bloomsbury Group web resources:

http://www.ksu.edu/english/westmank/literary/bloomsbury_resources.html
[22 February 2007]

http://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/bloomsbury.html/group.htm
[22 February 2007]


444


Library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf (The), housed in the Washington State University’s Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections which include over 6000 volumes belonging to the personal collection of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, purchased after Leonard's death in the 1970s and 1980s:


and for the online database:

http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/holland/masc/finders/cg674.htm [22 February 2007]


______. Card catalogue of gramophone recordings IU5 b (ad5 ; ad28) and ‘Diary of music listened to’ (IIR64). *Leonard Woolf Archive* of the University of Sussex Library Special Collections.

([http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_catalogues/woolf.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/speccoll/collection_catalogues/woolf.html) [22 February 2007])

2) All other primary and secondary sources (other authors, works on aesthetics, music - including scores -, literature and interdisciplinary studies, and aesthetics of literature and music)


Alvira, José Rodriguez. ‘Analysis of Bach's fugue BWV 846 in C major (WTC I)’, online: http://www.teoria.com/articulos/analisis/BWV846/index.htm [22 February 2007]


Bach, J.S. Fugue in C major, BWV 846, score online: http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/ Variations/scores/abt8726/index.html [22 February 2007]


__________. Dada Manifesto (1916), online: http://www.391.org/manifestos/hugoball_dadamannesto.htm [22 February 2007]


Bell, Clive. Art (1914), London: Chatto & Windus, 1928.


Bizzini, Chantal. Abstract for a lecture on 'Victorian English poet, G.M. Hopkins and Hart Crane: visionary poets and witnesses of their time', Gerard Manley Hopkins 2003 Summer School, online:


Botstein, Leon. ‘Listening through Reading: Musical Literacy and the Concert Audience’.


Bucknell, Brad. *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics – Pater, Pound, Joyce and Stein*.


__________. Virtual museum (over 200 online paintings): http://www.expo-cezanne.com [22 February 2007]


Chopin, Frédéric. *Etude* op. 25 No. 1 in A flat major, online: [www.sheetmusicarchive.net](http://www.sheetmusicarchive.net) [22 February 2007]


Covent Garden Opera House website:
[http://info.royaloperahouse.org/AbouttheHouse/Index.cfm?ccs=288&cs=1017&SubNavMenu=6](http://info.royaloperahouse.org/AbouttheHouse/Index.cfm?ccs=288&cs=1017&SubNavMenu=6) [22 February 2007]


Debussy, Claude. *Préludes pour piano*. online score: [www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org) [22 February 2007]


De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, online: [http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2040](http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2040) [22 February 2007]


Grant, Duncan. *Girl at the piano.* Oil on Canvas, 1940. NO5171. Tate Britain.

Green, Christopher D. (ed.), Classics in the History of Psychology, York University, Toronto, Canada, online: http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/ [22 February 2007]


Holmes, Oliver Wendell. ‘Poem, at the Dedication of the Halleck Monument’ (July 1869), in Poems, a Volume Printed in Raised Letters for the Blind, online: http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/owh/halleck.html [22 February 2007]


Hopkins Quarterly Journal (The), online: http://hopkinsquarterly.com/ [22 February 2007]


International Association for Word and Music Studies (WMA) website:
http://www.wordmusicstudies.org/index.html [22 February 2007]

International Coloured Gemstone Association website, ICA Gem Bureau, Idar-Oberstein, website:

International Music Score Library Project (online music scores in the public domain):
www.imslp.org [22 February 2007]


James, Henry. The Art of Fiction, online:
http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no1/james.html [22 February 2007]

James, William. The Principles of Psychology (1890), online:


Kandisky, Wassily. Concerning the Spiritual in Art, online:
http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/cnsprl0.txt [22 February 2007]


Lemaire, Jaques (ed.). Miscellaneous online poems from the baroque to Modernism, College Jean-de-Brébeuf, online: http://www.poetes.com [22 February 2007]


Merrill, Stuart. ‘Nocturne’ (1887), online at http://www.poetes.com/merrill/nocturne.htm [22 February 2007]


Music and Neuroimaging Laboratory, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, website: http://www.musicianbrain.com [22 February 2007]


‘Orpheus charming the beasts’, Roman mosaic, Shahba Museum, Syria, online: http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/Z49.2.html [22 February 2007]


Project Gutenberg (online texts): http://www.gutenberg.org [22 February 2007]


Richardson, Dorothy. ‘Pointed Roofs’, *Pilgrimage*, Volume 1, Chapter III, part 7. (text online: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext02/point10.txt [22 February 2007])


Schubert, Franz. ‘Trout’ Piano Quintet, op. 114, online: http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/bhq1735/index.html [22 February 2007]


Shone, Richard (Ed.). *The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant*.


Tate Online: [http://www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) [22 February 2007]
The Times, ‘Concerts’, Tuesday May 03, 1904; pg. 10; Issue 37384; col D, The Times Digital Archive 1785-1985, British Library.

Tovey, Donald Francis. Beethoven. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Ubuweb, independent resource dedicated to all strains of the avant-garde, ethnopoetics, and outsider arts: http://www.ubu.com [22 February 2007]

University of Adelaide Library (The), ebooks: http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au [22 February 2007]


