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Vision and Voice in Mansfield's "At the Bay" and Woolf's *The Waves*

In recent years, leading scholars in the disciplines of Art History and Philosophy have carried out vital work on the nature of perception, optical experience, perspective and the status of the observer/spectator (cf. Jonathan Crary 1990, 1999; James Elkins 1994; 1999; Gerald Vision 1997). Such work poses a challenge to the nature of critical enquiry, not only within Art History and Philosophy but within the field of Literature. Indeed, the influence of Word and Image Studies over recent years is an indication of the scholarly recognition that, while the established disciplines are ordered by questions of tradition, genre, technique, form, to fully and critically engage with other disciplines is not only to de- and re-construct texts, images, histories, but to engage in an *enabling* act of critical exploration. My current research project is such an attempt, to engage with the work of leading scholars on the nature of viewing, equally to re-examine a particular historical context – the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – in which the nature of viewing was questioned, assessed, theorised, and indeed led to the development of new branches of science and philosophy. In the nineteenth century, the nature of viewing changed utterly, and this whether one chooses to locate such a change, following Crary (1990), in the optical experiments and instruments of the early century, or to enjoy the established art-historical view of a late-century rupture in modes of viewing as demanded by Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art.

This article explores the relationship between narrative voice and the process of viewing that one experiences as a reader engaged in an act of reading demanding both verbal and visual engagement with the text.

Both Mansfield and Woolf explored the ways in which the text engages the reader's imaginative perception of a narrative visual "reality". In this, they were responding to new modes of representation created by aesthetic practice of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, principally in France. Thus, the construction of the visual in their works of fiction reveals diverse aesthetic influences: their individual narrative styles reveal impressionist, expressionist, fauvist traits. Equally they were concerned with the recording of sensation and perception: what is perception and how do we feel? Mansfield was less discursive than Woolf in this respect, not seeking to describe in verbal terms the relaying of sensation, merely seeking to show it; her lightness of touch in this respect enables the reader to ask how and why s/he is experiencing a scene through the eyes of a child, for example, before a subsequent episode presents a different, adult, apprehension of the world. Their fiction was thus influenced equally by scientific advances in the relatively new fields of physiology and psychology of the period. This article offers an analysis of the role of vision and voice in the formation of narrative identity, and asks questions about the ways in which we as readers come to experience a text; how do we draw on our own experience as we participate in an act of reading; how does voice influence our understanding of a work of fiction; how does vision impact on our participation in making sense of a text; ultimately, how is visual perception realised in a work of verbal art?

While entirely different in form and preoccupation, Mansfield's "At the Bay" (1922) and Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) are ordered by passages describing the passing of time, of a day at the sea, from sunrise to sunset. "At the Bay" is the story of a day in the life of the Burnell family one summer; *The Waves* an attempt at grasping – and by grasping through language, writing – the story (Bernard's story) of six lives. Before I proceed, a brief comment on the form that this article will take. The first section presents the variety of visual and verbal focus in "At the Bay" through close analysis of the text; the second section, concerned with *The Waves*, is self-consciously more discursive, positing an individual negotiation of Woolf's text and its preoccupation with the very concept of the individual, of identity.

In "At the Bay", Mansfield manipulates narrative voice in order to introduce the reader to the New Zealand location and the Burnell household, to make familiar, to draw us in, to show us how wonderful and sparkling the day is; to show how the children experience life differently from the grown ups, whether through perception, fear,

incomplete mastery of a situation or lack of language, and then how the adults view, perceive, deal with one another and their own attempts to live life, now that they are grown, and everything should seem straightforward, even though this is rarely the case. "At the Bay" is set at Muritai or Day's Bay, on the eastern side of Wellington harbour, where Mansfield and her family spent summer holidays, and Mansfield makes the exotic New Zealand landscape familiar to us by describing it as a child would, simply naming plants without giving explanations or alluding to their strangeness or inherently exotic quality. We are paradoxically therefore immediately experiencing the new and the familiar, and this was a professed aim of Mansfield:

> I have tried to make it as familiar to "you" as it is to me. You know the marigolds? You know those pools in the rocks? You know the mousetrap on the wash house window sill? And, too, one tries to go deep – to speak to the secret self we all have – to acknowledge that.
>
> (Mansfield: *Collected Letters* 4: 278)

> Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist. The big bush-covered hills at the back were smothered. You could not see where they ended and the paddocks and bungalows began. The sandy road was gone and the paddocks and bungalows the other side of it; there were no white dunes covered with reddish grass beyond them; there was nothing to mark which was beach and where was the sea. A heavy dew had fallen. The grass was blue. Big drops hung on the bushes and just did not fall; the silvery, fluffy toi-toi was limp on its long stalks, and all the marigolds and the pinks in the bungalow gardens were bowed to the earth with wetness. Drenched were the cold fuchsias, round pearls of dew lay on the flat nasturtium leaves. It looked as though the sea had beaten up softly in the darkness, as though one immense wave had come rippling, rippling – how far? Perhaps if you had waked up in the middle of the night you might have seen a big fish flicking in at the window and gone again….
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 205)

Mansfield's enthusiasm immerses us in the scene – *drenched* – a rhetorical question involves us directly – *how far?* – we don't know, but we can only imagine, we respond, making the scene our own. We find ourselves suddenly "outside Mrs Stubb's shop" – we know it is hers even as it appears in the text and in our mind's eye. We agree with the narrator, *it was marvellous…* We smell the leaves, feel the breeze, look in every direction, and are delighted to be At the Bay. The story is divided into thirteen sections of unequal length; each has its own distinct character and use of

narrative voice. From the opening sequence almost, cinematic in its use of panorama and zooming-in features, we are plunged in the second section into the action of the morning at the bay, with the morning bathe, a sprint to the sea:

> A few moments later the back door of one of the bungalows opened, and a figure in a broad-striped bathing suit flung down the paddock, cleared the stile, rushed through the tussock grass into the hollow, staggered up the sandy hillock, and raced for dear life over the big porous stones, over the cold, wet pebbles, on to the hard sand that gleamed like oil. Splish-Splosh! Splish-Splosh! The water bubbled round his legs as Stanley Burnell waded out exulting. First man in as usual! He'd beaten them all again.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 208)

Stanley Burnell, introduced in the first multi-claused, pulsing sentence, is the father of the family, a figure who is both loved and feared for his conventional "masculinity" in the otherwise largely female household (the only other male is the baby, referred to as "the boy"). In section three, up at the house, we are plunged into the ordered chaos of the morning routine, as Mansfield shows us three little girls, Isabel, Kezia and Lottie, parading in with father's breakfast, their grandma, Mrs Fairfield, guiding the procession, Aunt Beryl and the servant-girl Alice dutifully attending, all of whom have their own voices and identities as subsequent sections reveal. All is action as Stanley attempts to get ready to leave the house, and the palpable sense of relief as he does finally depart is conveyed by the women's reactions, the relief in their voices, and impressed on the reader by Mansfield as narrator:

> Oh the relief, the difference it made to have the man out of the house. Their very voices were changed as they called to one another; they sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret. Beryl went over to the table. 'Have another cup of tea, mother. It's still hot.' She wanted, somehow, to celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now. There was no man to disturb them; the whole perfect day was theirs.
>
> 'No thank you, child,' said old Mrs Fairfield, but the way at that moment she tossed the boy up and said 'a-goos-a-goos-a-ga!' to him meant that she felt the same. The little girls ran into the paddock like chickens let out of a coop.
>
> Even Alice, the servant-girl, washing up the dishes in the kitchen, caught the infection and used the precious tank water in a perfectly reckless fashion.
>
> 'Oh, these men!' said she, and she plunged the teapot into the bowl and held it under the water even after it had stopped bubbling, as if it too was a man and drowning was too good for them.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 213)

The fourth section has the reader outside with the girls, ready to experience the adventures of the day before them. To begin with, stile climbing:

> 'Wait for me, Isa-bel! Kezia, wait for me!'
>
> There was poor little Lottie, left behind again, because she found it so fearfully hard to get over the stile by herself. When she stood on the first step her knees began to wobble; she grasped the post. Then you had to put one leg over. But which leg? She never could decide. And when she did finally put one leg over with a sort of stamp of despair – then the feeling was awful. She was half in the paddock still and half in the tussock grass. She clutched the post desperately and lifted up her voice. 'Wait for me!'
>
> 'No, don't you wait for her, Kezia!' said Isabel. 'She's such a little silly. She's always making such a fuss. Come on!' And she tugged Kezia's jersey. 'You can use my bucket if you come with me, 'she said kindly. 'It's bigger than yours.' But Kezia couldn't leave Lottie all by herself. She ran back to her. By this time Lottie was very red in the face and breathing heavily.
>
> 'Here, put your other foot over, 'said Kezia.
>
> Lottie looked down at Kezia as if from a mountain height.
>
> 'Here where my hand is.' Kezia patted the place.
>
> 'Oh, *there* do you mean?' Lottie gave a deep sigh and put the second foot over.
>
> 'Now – sort of turn round and sit down and slide, 'said Kezia.
>
> 'But there's nothing to sit down *on*, Kezia,' said Lottie.
>
> She managed it at last, and once it was over she shook herself and began to beam.
>
> 'I'm getting better at climbing over stiles, aren't I, Kezia?'
>
> Lottie's was a very hopeful nature.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 213-14)

Again, there is Mansfield as narrator filling us in, making this scene one of many with which we too are becoming familiar as a member of the household on this day, this perfect morning as Mrs Fairfield calls it. The stile safely negotiated, the girls climb the hill to the top. The narrative viewpoint suddenly changes, from close to, we are distanced, we become omniscient, we watch with Mansfield as the girls finish their climb, as they survey the scene, deciding where to go to on the beach below; we see them from behind, suddenly they are "minute puzzled explorers":

> The pink and the blue sunbonnet followed Isabel's bright red sunbonnet up that sliding, slipping hill. At the top they paused to decide where to go and to have a good stare at who was there already. Seen from behind, standing against the skyline, gesticulating largely with their spades, they looked like minute puzzled explorers.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 214)

At the beach, the girls meet their cousins, Pip and Rags and are shown "a lovely green thing", probably a piece of sea-polished glass, which Pip calls a "nemeral":

> And his hand opened; he held up to the light something that flashed, that winked, that was a most lovely green.
>
> 'It's a nemeral, 'said Pip solemnly.
>
> 'Is it really, Pip?' Even Isabel was impressed.
>
> The lovely green thing seemed to dance in Pip's fingers. Aunt Beryl had a nemeral in a ring, but it was a very small one. This one was as big as a star ands far more beautiful.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 216)

The fifth section shows us late morning on the beach; the social structure of Bay society is depicted with detached amusement by Mansfield, who again sets out to make us familiar through panoramic and close-up visual narrative techniques, as the children splash about (from the view of the minute girls on the hill we are down in the water with Lottie, as she gingerly makes her way into the sea, "in her own way, please") and Aunt Beryl interacts with the rather too risqué Mrs Harry Kember, an object of fascination and repulsion to shy repressed Beryl. Mrs Harry Kember excites universal disapproval, and this makes her sexuality all the more desirable and threatening:

> The women at the Bay [and we hear their voices] thought she was very, very fast. Her lack of vanity, her slang, the way she treated men as though she was one of thewm, ands the fact that she didn't care twopence about her house and called the servant Gladys 'Glad-eyes', was disgraceful.
>
> (…)
>
> But Beryl was shy. She never undressed in front of anybody. Was that silly? Mrs Harry Kember made her feel it was silly, even something to be ashamed of. Why be shy indeed!
>
> (…)
>
> 'That's better,' said Mrs Harry Kember. They began to go down the beach together. 'Really, it's a sin for you to wear clothes, my dear. Somebody's got to tell you some day.'
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 218-20)

From the beach we leap in section six to the garden, precisely to the steamer chair in which Linda Burnell, Stanley's wife, the girls' mother, is dreaming the morning away. And we dream with her:

Dazzling white the picotees shone; the golden-eyed marigolds glittered; the nasturtiums wreathed the veranda poles in green and gold flame. If only one had time to look at these flowers long enough, time to get over the sense of novelty and strangeness, time to know them! But as soon as one paused to part the petals, to discover the under-side of the leaf, along came Life and one was swept away. And lying in her cane chair, Linda felt so light; she felt like a leaf. Along came Life like a wind and she was seized and shaken; she had to go. Oh dear, would it always be so? Was there no escape?

(Mansfield 1981: 221)

But despite Linda's professed lack of maternal feeling, she cannot help herself smiling back at her smiling baby:

The boy had turned over. He lay facing her, and he was no longer asleep. His dark-blue, baby eyes were open; he looked as though he was peeping at his mother. And suddenly his face dimpled; it broke into a wide, toothless smile, a perfect beam, no less.

'I'm here!' that happy smile seemed to say. 'Why don't you like me?'

There was something so quaint, so unexpected about that smile that Linda smiled herself. But she checked herself and said to the boy coldly, 'I don't like babies.'

'Don't like babies?' The boy couldn't believe her. 'Don't like *me*?' He waved his arms foolishly at his mother.

(…)

Linda was so astonished at the confidence of this little creature… Ah no, be sincere. That was not what she felt; it was something far different, it was something so new, so…. The tears danced in her eyes; she breathed in a small whisper to the boy, 'Hallo, my funny!'

(Mansfield 1981: 223)

Section VII brings us back to the sea; the tide is out, and we, unaccompanied, observe the seascape. Unaccompanied that is, until the narrative points out "Over there on the weed-hung rocks…":

The tide was out; the beach was deserted; lazily flopped the warm sea. The sun beat down, beat down hot and fiery on the fine sand, baking the grey and blue and black and white-veined pebbles. It sucked up the little drop of water that lay in the hollow of the curved shells; it bleached the pink convolvulus that threaded through and through the sand-hills. Nothing seemed to move but the small sand-hoppers. Pit-pit-pit! They were never still.

Over there on the weed-hung rocks that looked at low tide like shaggy beasts come down to the water to drink, the sunlight seemed to spin like a silver coin dropped into each of the small rock pools. They danced, they quivered, and minute ripples laved the porous shores. Looking down, bending over, each pool was like a lake with pink and blue houses clustered on the shores; and oh! the vast mountainous

> country behind those houses – the ravines, the passes, the dangerous creeks and fearful tracks that led to the water's edge. Underneath waved the sea-forest – pink thread-like trees, velvet anemones, and orange berry-spotted weeds. Now a stone on the bottom moved, rocked, and there was a glimpse of a black feeler; now a thread-like creature wavered by and was lost. Something was happening to the pink waving trees; they were changing to a cold moonlight blue. And now there sounded the faintest 'plop'. Who made that sound? What was going on down there? And how strong, how damp the seaweed smelt in the hot sun…..
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 224)

The bush quivers in a haze of heat; inside the bungalows of the summer colony, or the one to which we have access, Kezia and her grandmother are taking their siesta together. We see the room, the bed, hear their voices, follow their thoughts, love Mrs Fairfield as Kezia would (for we have already "been" Kezia, we know her, we felt her injustice at breakfast; and we admire Mrs Fairfield's lack of inhibition facing Stanley's patriarchal gesturing in the morning. Section VIII shows us Alice, the servant girl, on her way to tea at Mrs Stubbs. Overdressed, Mansfield as narrator comments obliquely, but not for the reason Beryl, who is sitting watching the scene through the window, imagines. Alice is not going to meet a horrible common larrikin but simply to tea at Mrs Stubbs's. Mansfield as narrator corrects Beryl's viewpoint, gently chiding her: "But no Beryl was unfair…", though the image of Alice's finery remains comical: we are allowed to laugh a little, but not unkindly, at that.

It is in the ninth section that Mansfield plunges us into the midst of the strange company assembled in the Burnell's wash house after tea. Gradually we realise that the company is made up of Isabel, Kezia, Lottie, Rags and Pip, and that they have adopted animal parts in the game they are playing. Lottie is not doing very well; forgets which animal she is supposed to be, and then what kind of noise she should be making. Again, as was the case in the bungalow where Kezia and her grandma are taking their siesta, Mansfield includes minute details, things children would notice, looking around, indiscriminate objects catching their eyes. Back in the wash house, we, as adult readers, have to work to keep up and remember which child is the rooster, the donkey, the bee, as Mansfield abandons the children's names, in keeping with the reality of the game; re-introducing them when the game reality breaks, is broken, by Lottie's questions or Isabel, the eldest's, attempts at adult mimicry. Suddenly there is a knock at the door and the animals are rooted to the spot:

'Ss! Wait a minute!' They were in the very thick of it when the bull stopped them, holding up his hand. 'What's that? What's that noise?'

'What noise? What do you mean?' asked the rooster.

'Ss! shut up! Listen!' They were mouse-still. 'I thought I heard a – a sort of knocking,' said the bull.

'What was it like?' asked the sheep faintly.

No answer.

The bee gave a shudder. 'Whatever did we shut the door for?' she said softly. Oh, why, why did we shut the door?

While they were playing, the day had faded; the gorgeous sunset had blazed and died. And now the quick dark came racing over the sea, over the sand-hills, up the paddock. You were frightened to look in the corners of the washhouse, and yet you had to look with all your might. And somewhere, far away, grandma was lighting a lamp. The blinds were being pulled down; the kitchen fire leapt in the tins on the mantelpiece.

'It would be awful now,' said the bull, 'if a spider was to fall from the ceiling on to the table, wouldn't it?'

'Spiders don't fall from ceilings.'

'Yes, they do. Our Min told us she'd seen a spider as big as a saucer, with long hairs on it like a gooseberry.'

Quickly all the little heads were jerked up; all the little bodies drew together, pressed together.

'Why doesn't somebody come and call us?' cried the rooster.

Oh, those grown-ups, laughing and snug, sitting in the lamp-light, drinking out of cups! They'd forgotten about them. No, not really forgotten. That was what their smile meant. They had decided to leave them there all by themselves.

Suddenly Lottie gave such a piercing scream that all of them jumped off their forms, all of them screamed too. 'A face – a face looking!' shrieked Lottie.

It was true, it was real. Pressed against the window was a pale face, black eyes, a black beard.

'Grandma! Mother! Somebody!'

But they had not got to the door, tumbling over one another, before it opened for Uncle Jonathan. He had come to take the little boys home.

(Mansfield 1981: 234-5)

The sun has set; in section X1 we sit, with Florrie the cat, on the veranda:

Light shone in the windows of the bungalow. Two square patches of gold fell upon the pinks and the peaked marigolds. Florrie, the cat, came out on to the veranda, and sat on the top step, her white paws close together, her tail curled round. She looked content, as though she had been waiting for this moment all day.

'Thank goodness, it's getting late,' said Florrie. 'Thank goodness, the long day is over.' Her greengage eyes opened.

(Mansfield 1981: 239)

Stanley arrives home, and we see a glimpse of what Linda earlier called "her" Stanley. Night falls. Section XII introduces an unidentified voice filled with excitement. Whose is it? we ask, for it is not recognisable immediately. Our curiosity envelops us, and we are perhaps a little surprised to find it belonging to Beryl. We might not have thought her capable of childlike enthusiasm. But we read on…

> Why does one feel so different at night? Why is it so exciting to be awake when everybody else is asleep? Late – it is very late! And yet every moment you feel more and more wakeful, as though you were slowly, almost with every breath, waking up into a new, wonderful, far more thrilling and exciting world than the daylight one.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 241)

Beryl is dreaming of romantic adventure as she gets ready for bed. And Mansfield, while smiling at Beryl, and directing us to smile, is sympathetic. As readers we have to check our initial amusement, and concur:

> It is lonely living by oneself. Of course, there are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that's not what she means. She want some one who will find the beryl they none of them know, who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 242)

Mansfield may have made Beryl familiar to us, but after all she is the narrative voice from whom all other voices come. Beryl sees herself in the third person: "It wasn't possible to think that Beryl Fairfield never married, that lovely fascinating girl…" (Mansfield 1981: 243). She hears a voice, a man, at the gate, calling her; her dream materialises; she climbs out of her low window, runs down the grass to the gate and "the voice" speaks again. Suddenly, confronted with her dream, no longer a daydream, out of the safety of her imagination and her bedroom, no longer looking in the glass, she is frightened, terrified. The voice belongs to Harry Kember, a name with which we are familiar once again, the man described in hyper-real terms in section V:

> Mrs Kember's husband was at least ten years younger than she was, and so incredibly handsome that he looked like a mask or a most perfect illustration in an American novel rather than a man. Black hair, dark blue eyes, red lips, a slow sleepy smile, a fine tennis player, a perfect dancer, and with it all a mystery.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 218)

Beryl flees and leaves Harry bemused, stammering, calling out in the dark. But nobody answers him. The final section leaves us unruffled. All is still. Presumably Beryl is asleep, or at least safe in bed. Mansfield retires, leaving us with the images and voices of a day at her bay:

> A cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still.
>
> (Mansfield 1981: 245)

II

Woolf's *The Waves* is preoccupied with identity, with language and sensation, but in a very different way from "At the Bay", where everything becomes – is instantly – familiar, and as readers we connect to childhood and adult desires and fears. From the outset, we are aware in *The Waves* of the pattern Woolf wishes to establish, in her italicised passages which mark the passing of time and punctuate the story of the six lives of the main protagonists Bernard, Louis, Neville, Jinny, Susan and Rhoda. To begin with, they are children. But their voices are not childlike, or at least are capable of expanding and contracting, telescoping and becoming microscopic, as they consider elements of time past and future, elements of their relations to each other and to the world which they are beginning to perceive, to encounter to attempt to understand. Thus:

> '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.'
>
> 'Islands of light are swimming on the grass,' said Rhoda. 'They have fallen through the trees.'
>
> 'The birds' eyes are bright in the tunnels between the leaves,' said Neville.

'The stalks are covered with harsh, short hairs,' said Jinny, 'and drops of water have stuck to them.'

'A caterpillar is curled in a green ring,' said Susan, 'notched with blunt feet.'

'The grey-shelled snail draws across the path and flattens the blades behind him,' said Rhoda.

'And burning lights from the window-panes flash in and out on the grasses,' said Louis.

'Stones are cold to my feet,' said Neville. 'I feel each one, round or pointed, separately.'

'The back of my hand burns,' said Jinny, 'but the palm is clammy and damp with dew.'

'Now the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide,' said Bernard.

'Birds are singing up and down and in and out all round us,' said Susan.

'The beast stamps, the elephant with its foot chained; the great brute on the beach stamps,' said Louis.

'Look at the house,' said Jinny, 'with all its windows white with blinds.'

'Cold water begins to run from the scullery tap,' said Rhoda, 'over the mackerel in the bowl.'

'The walls are cracked with gold cracks, 'said Bernard, 'and there are blue, finger-shaped shadows of leaves beneath the windows.'

'Now Mrs Constable pulls up her thick black stockings, ' said Susan.

'When the smoke rises, sleep curls off the roof like a mist,' said Louis.

'The birds sang in chorus first,' said Rhoda. 'Now the scullery door is unbarred. Off they fly. Off they fly like a fling of seed. But one sings by the bedroom window alone.'

'Bubbles form on the floor of the saucepan,' said Jinny. 'Then they rise, quicker and quicker, in a silver chain to the top.'

'Now Biddy scrapes the fish-scales with a jagged knife on to a wooden board,' said Neville.

'The dining-room window is dark blue now,' said Bernard, 'and the air ripples above the chimneys.'

'A swallow is perched on the lightning-conductor,' said Susan. 'and Biddy has smacked down the bucket on the kitchen flags.'

'That is the first stroke of the church bell,' said Louis. 'Then the others follow; one, two; one, two; one, two.'

'Look at the table-cloth, flying white along the table,' said Rhoda. 'Now there are rounds of white china, and silvers streaks beside each plate.'

'Suddenly a bee booms in my ear, 'said Neville. 'It is here; it is past.'

'I burn, I shiver,' said Jinny, 'out of this sun, into this shadow.'

'Now they have all gone,' said Louis. 'I am alone. They have gone into the house for breakfast, and I am left standing by the wall among the flowers. It is very early, before lessons. Flower after flower is specked on the depths of green. The petals are harlequins. Stalks rise from the black hollows beneath. The flowers swim like fish made of light upon the dark, green waters. 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. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs. Up here my eyes are

> green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. I hear tramplings, tremblings, stirrings round me'.
>
> (Woolf 1992: 5-7)

The opening section establishes events which mark all the protagonists (Jinny kisses Louis; Bernard and Susan go exploring; Susan sees two servants, Florrie and Ernest, kissing in the garden) and recur as leitmotifs explaining subsequent actions and inaction as the novel progresses and as Woolf plots their lives through language and imagery. We learn certain things about character, although Woolf and Bernard who tells stories, are loath to acknowledge that there is such a thing as a definite character, for the novel is an effort to impress upon the reader how many and varied are our Selves; how others imagine we are whole, when we are not; how destabilising perception and attribution can be to one's sense of self. Each voice, to begin with, is indistinct, but gradually we learn to distinguish traits, phrases, desires, fears, which belong to the individual voices. Louis has an Australian accent, his father is a banker at Brisbane, two unalterable "facts" which shape his relation to the world and other people; Jinny loves movement, to dance, to be admired; hers is the language of the body; Susan is at home in the countryside, takes on maternity, makes herself hard for her young ones; Rhoda looks for amulets to calm her, things that make her feel whole. Bernard loves words, collects phrases for a story which he realises he will never tell; Neville wants to love, to be splendid, needs an Other to calm his sense of anguish. And they all grow, as voices, as protagonists, and pass through the stages of life, of school, of youth, to middle-age, when phrases that recur ultimately are seen to define them as much as they can be defined as this or that. Woolf's text destabilises our concept of knowing identity through vision and voice. Paradoxically however, as readers, far from remaining unfamiliar, we come to know, to a certain extent, to recognise the visual and verbal traits of each of the protagonists. We recognise gestures, images, patterns, we are guided by the narrative voice, the narrative voices, for they are both distinct and a part of each other; they are linked and they separate, falling like echoes on the page, following the rhythm of Woolf's central motif of the waves, and the dying falls, the cadence of borrowed poetry, prose and drama from Woolf's well of impressions. We are familiar and yet distanced, the converse of our relation to Mansfield's vision of the bay. It is the immediacy of Mansfield's writing that jolts the reader

into active participation, plunges us willingly into the text and into the life of the Burnells at the sea. We follow and imagine and hear and taste, and plunge and rejoice in the location and the objects Mansfield holds up to our eyes. Conversely, we remain distanced from the six "individual" voices of *The Waves*; we cannot say we know them or are them; we lose our sense of self just as the protagonists grapple with their own identity and their relation to the world. Faced with the Mansfield text we are young again, we participate, we see through the children's eyes. Mansfield makes us small, makes us see, as Kezia does in "Prelude", a blue and a yellow Lottie through the stained glass window. Mansfield does not comment on perception; she involves us in the process of viewing and naming. In *The Waves*, things have names, children have adult language and philosophy at their disposal; all is strange, and then familiar, we cannot *love* the text as if it were experienced by us; Woolf's conscious lyricism, her work of great beauty, her prose poem as Stephen Spender called it, is matched by Mansfield's seemingly unconscious effort to reveal, to make new again, this blade of grass, this shiny button, that childhood worry or delight. And the delight, finally, is ours.

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