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English 188T: Digital Woolf

13 May 2021

The All-Knowing Bernard

Virginia Woolf's experimental novel *The Waves* is successful in creating a universal tone to show the shifting perspectives of society, but the point of focus is always most accurately and extensively referred back to Bernard as he recognizes the counterparts of influence he has accepted in the adaptation of his personality. The establishment of Bernard's perspective on the creation of personalities, the flux between separation and unity (Gorsky 454), and the overall idea of being "not one and simple, but complex and many" (Woolf 54) is established early within the novel and through the dissection of the overall influence of his foundational pals "experience is gradually transformed from conscious perception into unconscious content of the mind itself" (Stewart 433). This idea of the unconscious influence is then only emphasized through the lone perspective of the final chapter: Bernard's, "the man who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes" (Woolf 216) and struggled with the dissection of his friends' influence and the distinction of being a singular individual (Woolf 214). While Woolf maintains a universal tone throughout the novel, this final chapter provides insight into the authenticity of the individual perspective in regards to a collective experience and simultaneously relies on rhetorical misperception (Harker 2) to allow readers to create their own conclusions regarding this gang in focus and the lone voice of Bernard. Was Bernard able to decipher between the reality of the separate speaking narrators and his own experiences? Were the remaining members of this friend group complicit in the telling of their perspective and stories or were they merely

figments of the extensive imagination of an aspiring novelist? Or just maybe, is Woolf's inclusion of the all-knowing character of Bernard as a supposed witness to his environment meant to act as a metaphor for the watchful eye of God? The undisclosed details in correlation with Bernard's conclusion of events in *The Waves* keeps the reader conspiring on Woolf's intent in her literary decisions while the unknown nature surrounding the characters makes perfect sense given the already present omniscient details throughout the novel.

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