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### Yourcenar's Les Vagues: changing the rhythm of The Waves

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Yourcenar's Les Vagues:  
Changing the Rhythm of The Waves

by

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Accepted BA, University of Michigan, 1985  
the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature  
in the Graduate School of the  
State University of New York  
at Binghamton

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Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature  
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On February 7, 1931, Virginia Woolf writes in her diary, "Here in the few minutes that remain, I must record, heaven be praised, the end of The Waves. . . How physical the sense of triumph and relief is!" Having written what many critics consider her masterpiece, Woolf took to bed, nursing an illness which her intensive work on the novel had aggravated. The following years were busy for her, and it is not until February 23, 1937 that we find the following recorded in her diary:

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On February 7, 1931, Virginia Woolf writes in her diary, "Here in the few minutes that remain, I must record, heaven be praised, the end of The Waves...How physical the sense of triumph and relief is!"<sup>1</sup> Having written what many critics consider her masterpiece, Woolf took to bed, nursing an illness which her intensive work on the novel had aggravated. The following years were busy for her; and it is not until February 23, 1937 that we find the following recorded in her diary:

That extraordinary scribble means, I suppose, the translator coming. Madame or Mlle Youniac(?) Not her name....I've no time or room to describe the translator, save that she wore some nice gold leaves on her black dress; is a woman I suppose with a past; amorous; intellectual; lives half the year in Athens; is in with Jaloux &c, red lipped, strenuous; a working Fchwoman (sic); friend of the Margerites; matter of fact; intellectual; we went through The Waves. What does 'See where he comes' mean & so on. (VWD 5, p. 60-61)

It is interesting that Woolf chooses to draw such a brief sketch of a woman who was to become one of France's most famous writers, Marguerite Yourcenar. The brevity of the sketch, and the indifference with which it appears, parallels the relative critical obscurity which Yourcenar's translation of The Waves has had for over fifty years. Yet, a critical comparison of these works proves rewarding. The Waves was, for Woolf, a coming to terms with concepts very abstract, but very important to her. For Yourcenar, the



translation of this work into Les Vagues was both an expression of admiration and a financial necessity. The differences in how each author was to approach the work make for some extreme differences in the way the works are rendered. We see Yourcenar re-creating Woolf's text in a way that Woolf, herself, might have questioned had she taken a more active approach to the translation of her work.

In a study of the translation of Woolf's novel, Yourcenar's style, diction, and word choice are often very accurate and very fine. However, when we look below the poetic language of the work--and we must remember that Yourcenar's most famous translations are those of the lyrics of Negro Spirituals and of modern Greek poetry--we find many differences in the text itself as well as in the author's attitude towards the characters and structural elements of the text. We are forced to consider whether these differences are the marks left by the process of translation itself, or whether the two women, author and translator, react differently because they are both, by profession, writers. Is Yourcenar acting in the role of translator or in that of creative writer? This question becomes more important when we consider the lack of interest that Woolf showed in the translation of her most difficult work. Yet, by asking questions about the intent, the structural similarity, and the content of Yourcenar's Les Vagues and Woolf's The Waves, we gain a better understanding of

Yourcenar's strengths and shortcomings as a translator as well as a better understanding of the novel as a whole.

If The Waves is a difficult book for the reader, it is perhaps of value to realize that it was also the book which Woolf had the most difficulty writing. The concept of a "play poem idea: the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night &c, all flowing together" (VWD 3, p. 139) haunted her from June of 1927. It was some time before she actually began writing, and when she did, the book tested her faculties. She writes, "If ever a book drained me, this one does." (VWD 3, p. 295) Her relationship to the work was tenuous at best; any disturbance could make the composition of the work difficult or even impossible. She was held back by social obligations, fragile health, and the conception of a new idea for a sequel to A Room of One's Own to be called "Professions for Women."<sup>2</sup> Yet it is perhaps less the fault of extenuating circumstances that Woolf had such difficulties than it is the fact that in this book, she is not simply creating what she hoped to be a great novel; though it became this, The Waves is also an expression of her artistic philosophy and an expression of some of her most vivid childhood memories. Woolf's work may have become more difficult because of the necessity which bordered on obsession of putting the memories and ideas which fell closest to her personal life into words.

As evidence of the proximity of this novel to her personal memories, we have only to look at Woolf's autobiographical writings. "A Sketch of the Past," written in 1939 and 1940, gives the reader accounts of several of her earliest memories. Among these are episodes which reappear in The Waves such as the recognition of an apple tree as representative of death, and a similar view of a puddle which she could not cross. Her earliest memory is one of the most interesting and pertinent. She writes about the recollection

of lying half asleep, half awake, in the bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, and sending a splash of water on the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind.<sup>3</sup>

Although this is not inserted word for word into the text, Louis evokes a great beast stamping in the echo of the waves that he hears behind the blinds of his nursery. The novel, in these images, expresses a darkness which Woolf struggled with her entire life: coming to terms with that which represented death.

The novel not only expresses the dark side of her ideas, however. The scene of the seven-sided flower makes Woolf's artistic philosophy extremely clear. The flower's wholeness, which is the result of the combined views of separate characters, defines imagistically Woolf's belief that there is a unity in the world which is the result of the combination of many different views. There is, for



Woolf, an essential connection between everyone and everything. Thus, we find expressed in the autobiographical writings, "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."<sup>4</sup> Woolf evokes the wholeness of this halo in the lives of her characters. The Waves is not a selection of soliloquies, to be read for their separate story lines. Indeed, if we were to read only Bernard's "speeches," or Rhoda's, or Jinny's, we would turn up a story that is startlingly incomplete. It is only as a whole that these six characters can function. Because these speeches seem to form a whole, we might consider the six characters as forming a self--not necessarily that of the author--which is at once a continuous entity and one subject to change. This idea is also expressed in "A Sketch of the Past." In her writings, Woolf gives us a view of herself both formed by and containing the lives of her step-sister, sister, and mother.

Woolf also stresses the value of the individual. For Woolf, much turns on history, be it of the family or of the world. She writes, "The present, when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else."<sup>5</sup> In this, Woolf expresses what each of the characters in the novel expresses at certain times in their lives: that there is a sense of the world around them which includes past, present, and

future. Be it Rhoda's view of the coast of Africa, or Neville's imagination of India, or Louis' vision of ancient Egypt, all characters seem to have a sense of the continuity of life itself. These concepts make The Waves the most encompassing of Woolf's works.

It seems odd that when the translation of this work was done, it was done with what seems to be a fair amount of indifference on the part of Yourcenar. In 1937, when she finished the translation, The Waves was already a great success in England. Yourcenar's translation was, according to Jean Guiguet, "well received by the public in its time. But Yourcenar is a good writer and the success of the book may be due to her talents as such as well as to the interest roused by V.W. and the strangeness of The Waves at the time." <sup>6</sup> Guiguet makes no comment about Yourcenar's attitude, but does stress that the book was already popular. It comes as no surprise that a French publisher first approached Yourcenar to translate the book. It is in her comments about this to Matthieu Galey that we see the first strains of indifference towards the work. She says, "In a way I did it to eat: I was twenty years old and at that point had no money. The offer to do the translation seemed wonderful to me, even though translators are never very well paid. But I had the pleasure of meeting the author." <sup>7</sup> The translation, then was not the highly personal experience for Yourcenar that writing the novel was for Woolf. It seems

that this is almost never the case--the translator is seldom as involved in the work as the author. Yet the fact that this is one of Yourcenar's accomplishments least mentioned--by herself as well as by her critics--gives the reader the idea that it is overshadowed for no readily apparent reason. The work is good, and she was satisfied with it; yet it has had no personal or critical attention.

The process of working on the translation itself has been very vaguely documented. We have few comments in Yourcenar's own words about the process, how it affected her, and how it was done. This is in stark contrast to Woolf's almost daily record of the number of words she had written, the characterizations she was working on, and the problems she had overcome. We have already seen Woolf's portrayal of her meeting with Yourcenar; and in the reader's mind, we have a picture of the two women bent over a manuscript of the work, going over it with great care. Yet a query to Yourcenar about the process of the translation and the involvement of the author in the process proved different from Woolf's rendition. She writes, "Je suis un peu surprise qu'elle ait écrit dans son journal avoir 'travaillé' avec moi sur cette traduction, car nous nous (illegible) d'en causer alors qu'elle n'était même pas commencée. J'ai passé une intéressante après-midi à parler à Virginia Woolf et à l'écouter mais elle ne voulait (illegible) pas s'occuper de la traduction..."<sup>8</sup> In her



conversations with Matthieu Galey, she also comments upon the indifference that Woolf had about working with her: "In fact, she had no opinion on the question. She said, 'Do whatever you like.'" <sup>9</sup> This did not seem to daunt Yourcenar, nor does it seem to have caused her to admire the work less. She does seem to have considered it important to have seen Woolf, however, for she alludes often to her fragile, threatened look. She writes in the introduction to her translation,

Dans le salon vaguement éclairé par les lueurs de feu où Mrs. Woolf avait bien voulu m'accueillir, je regardais se profiler sur la pénombre ce pale visage de jeune Parque à peine vieillie, mais délicatement marquée des signes de la pensée et de la lassitude, et je me disais que le reproche d'intellectualisme est souvent adressé aux natures les plus fines, les plus ardemment vivantes, obligées par leur fragilité ou par leur excès de forces à recourir sans cesse aux dures disciplines de l'esprit.<sup>10</sup>

We sense that Yourcenar is less impressed with Woolf's commitment to her work than she is with her personal appearance. This impression of Woolf as a fragile artist comes through in her characterization of the artist in the work, especially in the case of Neville. It seems that Yourcenar gleaned important information through her meeting with Woolf, though not of the sort that would allow Woolf to collaborate on the work.

However indifferent both author and translator seemed about the work's translation, Yourcenar did appear to be very impressed with The Waves. She tells Matthieu Galey

that it "is still my favorite of her novels."<sup>11</sup> and writes that although it was not a choice of hers, as were her translations of the modern Greek poet Cavafy, "J'admirais Waves, mais pas assez pour entreprendre de moi-même un travail pareil."<sup>12</sup> In her preface, she compares the work with a fugue, with modern painting, with the work of Joyce, Lawrence, and Proust. She writes of "une poésie secrète, une profondeur de sérénité, un sens magique de l'enchantement des choses" and the "charme presque idyllique de la couleur." (Vagues, p. 11-12) Yourcenar sees all of the structural beauties of the text, as well as its problems. She sees the obviously difficult nature of characters who do not act, per se; she sees the claims this type of work lays on the intellect, rather than on the imagination. She sees the demands made on the reader by the complexity of the interweaving soliloquies. It is with this background that Yourcenar approaches Woolf's text: seeing its merits and problems, without significant input from the author, as a young writer in her own right, who was at the brink of a successful career.

Yourcenar's translation was successful, and remains a beautiful piece of art. Her sense of the poetic allows her to retain the weightiness of some of Woolf's most difficult sections. The interlude sections of the novel, often seen as the most puzzling and yet most beautiful aspect of the work, are rendered by Yourcenar with much of the imagery,

beauty, and mystery of the original still intact. The interludes are prose poetry, and it is perhaps for this reason that Yourcenar translates them so well. She is most famous for, and possibly most comfortable with, translations of poetry. For reasons of space and my desire to consider characterization in the work in great depth, I will not discuss at this point the relatively minor problems in some of the interlude imagery. There are moments when a crucial repetition is left out, or when alliteration which is powerful in the English text must be lost in the French of necessity. This type of flaw is common in the work of the translator. In all, I must say that the interludes are admirably done.

The main body of the text, which is not quite as poetic, but which is just as difficult, is a set of soliloquies, "said" by each of six characters. The interludes separate sections designating periods in the lives of these characters. Floris Delattre rightly points out that Yourcenar did a fine job with the text as well. "[Elle a su garder l'aspect dominant, ce perpétuel ruissellement de lumières qui le (le texte) parcourt tout entier...la plupart du temps, elle a levé les difficultés de tout ordre dont ce texte foisonne."<sup>13</sup> In this respect, the text of Yourcenar is very apt. However, there are some problems with the translation of the speeches which require the reader's attention. Yourcenar changes the sense of the work in



certain cases by making changes to words, structure and especially to punctuation. The sense of time itself, which is so important to Woolf's work, seems distorted in Yourcenar's translation. The result is a translation which is very beautiful on a superficial reading but which is deceptive in its beauty; it changes the original novel, creating a new novel by Yourcenar, rather than presenting the novel by Woolf with all possible accuracy.

It is, perhaps, easiest to begin the critique of a translation with a discussion of its physical structure, Although there is no hard and fast rule that a translation must appear exactly as the original appeared, there is reason to believe that authors structure their works in certain ways for a purpose. This is especially true of poetry, and Yourcenar recognizes this in her discussion of the translation of poetry.<sup>14</sup> Yet she was given to translating poetry into prose, at times; and, in like manner, she changes the structure of Woolf's Waves to meet the needs of her perception of the text. This is not always unsuccessful, and more often than not the reader passes by the structural changes without noticing them. When the texts are compared, however, we see that these structural changes often result in an interpretation of the text which destroys the unity which Woolf intended for each character.

A general similarity in the physical representation of the text does serve to preserve some of its unity. Woolf's

interludes, which describe the sea, a house, and the passage of time (focusing on the time of day, but also describing the passage of seasons), are separated and italicized just as they are in Woolf's text. This is important, for it gives the reader a sense of time condensed into a few short paragraphs. The italics allow the reader to attach importance to the interludes, as well as consider them a dream state where time is caught and suspended for the moment. The idea of catching the moment whole is central to Woolf's artistic theory, and is central to this book. A more detailed discussion of time will follow; yet for our present purposes, it is enough to say that Yourcenar lets this physical detail stand. She also allows the characters to appear purely through their "speech," as Woolf does. She does not inject prose description. This, too, has an effect on the way that the reader sees time in the novel by causing us to focus on the characters as purely present beings. The importance of this will also be discussed later.

In spite of this, Yourcenar does do much to change the structure of the text. In the translation, the characters are grouped together differently than they are in the original. Woolf, within each section, puts space between the "speeches" of certain characters; the rest of the characters speak in turn, their paragraphs following one another with regularity. Yourcenar changes this spacing in her translation and it has great effect on the

interpretation of the characters. Collins correctly expresses the function of the six characters saying, "the six 'voices' that make up the novel are not engaging in soliloquy at either a conscious or a sub-conscious level. Rather, they represent six parts of a total..."<sup>15</sup> Yet Yourcenar effectively destroys this unity by spacing between the paragraphs of characters whose "speeches" are intended to be together, or by breaking a single character's speech. For example, we see Yourcenar separate Bernard's words from Louis' words, even though Bernard's speech begins with "Je pense à Louis maintenant." (Vagues, p. 105/Waves, p.91) Although the break here is not illogical, it does serve to disunite the speeches of these two characters. This is a relatively minor instance of this type of change. Yourcenar makes a greater show of poor judgement in breaking one of Jinny's speeches. The final sentence of one of her paragraphs, "'And velvet flowers and leaves whose coolness has been stood in water wash me round, and sheathe me, embalming me,'" is broken off by Yourcenar into a paragraph of its own. (Vagues, p. 193/Waves, p. 177) Whether this was done to accent the tone of death, or was done to accent the poetic tone of the phrase, it breaks the stride of the image which makes up Jinny's final words of the section. The metaphor of the garden which came before this is made less important than her final words, and the mood of the paragraph is changed from magical to morbid.



Yourcenar uses such unconventional breaks several times in the novel. Perhaps the two most distressing paragraphing changes are made when the group is dining at Hampton Court, both before and after Percival's death. During these dinner scenes, Yourcenar not only separates characters at times inappropriate to the text, but also neglects the confidentiality which is expressed by Louis and Rhoda in their parenthetical dialogue. In the first episode, Yourcenar puts a space between Neville's speech beginning "Il n'est pas venu" and Rhoda's beginning "La porte bat sans cesse" (Vagues, p. 134, 135). The space is not present in the original. (Waves, p. 122). Moreover, this spacing separates the characters at a moment when they are to be most unified--in confronting the single character that they all admire, Percival. By separating their points of view in this place, we get a break in the "seven-sided flower" which later becomes a part of this scene. (Waves, p. 127). With this space, the points of view do not connect to form a whole.

Yourcenar puts a similar break in the second reunion at Hampton Court. We see a break in the text just after Bernard has said, "I do not altogether know who I am--Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs." (Waves, p. 276). Woolf breaks here, as does Yourcenar. Yet at this point, Woolf goes into a long

paragraph which includes each one of these characters, and ends with a view of "the body of the complete human being whom we failed to be, but at the same time, cannot forget." (Waves, p. 227) Yourcenar, however, breaks this paragraph, splitting Susan and Jinny from Neville, Louis, and Rhoda. She begins a new paragraph with "De son côté, Neville s'est mis à se vanter" (Vagues, p. 297) Although she faithfully translates the remaining image of the paragraph, the complete human being, we sense that the characters do not make up this human being. We have a feeling that the group is split, and that Neville is specifically responsible for this split. It is possible that Yourcenar wished to stress the failure of this effort; yet Woolf's text remains faithful to the image of unity which she believes should be present in this passage.

It is strange, then, that when faced with the necessity of breaking characters away from the group, Yourcenar does not do this. When, during the first dinner at Hampton Court, Woolf brings Louis and Rhoda together in confidentiality by having Louis begin a parenthetical remark, "'Look, Rhoda,'" Yourcenar combines this with the regular stream of the conversation. (Vagues, p. 153/Waves, p. 140) She also allows Louis' final remark to rest away from this cluster of conversation with Rhoda, his final line, "'La mort est entrelacée de violettes,' dit Louis. 'La mort, et de nouveau la mort.'" acting as its own para-



graph. (Vagues, p. 154/Waves, p. 141) In Yourcenar's text, this final comment acts almost as an introduction to Jinny's remarks. The words are not meant to function in this way, however. Yourcenar separates comments which belong together, and neglects the confidential comments of the two who are to become lovers in Woolf's text.

With this, we must consider the function of the characters in the novel. Although Woolf speaks of the unity of the characters, we must also consider each one as an individual in order to see how they function with respect to the larger elements of the novel. It is convenient to read the characters as a single persona; yet we must remember that they are presented to us as different characters, with different names, views and actions. We see them first as separate, no matter how similar they may seem, and our first instincts are to discover what makes each of them distinct. Schaefer writes, "The reader alone receives the gift of  
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absolute intimacy from each of the characters in turn."

This surface impression of the novel does carry some weight, for even Woolf treated the characters separately when discussing them in her diaries, and focused the unity of the novel in the narrator. Before we discuss this narrator, though, let us consider Yourcenar's rendering of individual characters. Focusing our attention on this, we see that her characterizations are, in the main, very accurate. However, there are moments in the translation when each of the char-

acters acts in ways very different than Woolf's characters. The changes in action are concentrated in the strength of each character, as well as in the character's relationship to time in the novel.

We find that each of the characters in The Waves develops through time in a very different way. The way in which the reader comes to know a character in this work is only by reading the entire work, for the characters are functions of rhythms and repetitions, obsessions and terrors which are not immediately described or apparent. Because the characters are representative of an entire text, they are susceptible to change in the rhythms of the text which might take place in translation. For example, Allen McLaurin suggests that Neville is a character committed to constant change. His rhythm is one of movement; he does not stagnate. He is, nevertheless, an ironic character because his change is the result of his endless search for  
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permanence and perfection. The reader sees this only through the development of the character in the entire book. Yourcenar's focus on Neville, however, does not stress this irony, nor does it stress the rhythm which he follows. We see the same episodes in Yourcenar's translation; yet the Neville that emerges is slightly different from that of Woolf.

Yourcenar's Neville is very much one dimensional. Whereas Woolf's character shows both strength and weakness,



as well as determination and insight, Yourcenar's character seems to be only dreamy, vague, and focused upon his own sexuality. Neville's sexuality is difficult to define, for Woolf creates a man who is covertly homosexual, and who considers his own personal conflicts with more care than he considers his sexuality. Yourcenar's Neville is much more overtly homosexual and less certain about his ability to express his conflicting feelings. In the beginning of the novel, for example, we hear Neville as a school-boy speaking of the religious ceremonies which he is forced to attend,

I gibe and mock at this sad religion, at these tremulous, grief-stricken figures advancing, cadaverous and wounded, down a white road shadowed by fig trees where boys sprawl in the dust--naked boys; (Waves, p.45)

Yourcenar's translation changes the focus of the words:

je n'ai que raillerie et dedain pour cette religion triste, pour ces tremblants, ces cadavériques personnages qui s'avancent, désolés et meurtris, le long d'une blanche route ombragée de figuiers où des jeunes garçons se vautrent dans la poussière. Des jeunes garçons nus... (Vagues, p. 35)

Yourcenar, by separating the last words of this thought into a sentence of their own, gives them primary importance. The ellipsis used at the end of this suggests that the thought continues in time, or that there is a pause following it. Thus, the mocking disdain of religion is forgotten in the implication that Neville is lost in the contemplation of naked boys. Woolf does not deny that he does think about them; but Yourcenar's separation and use of ellipsis makes

Neville far more concerned with the naked boys than he is in Woolf's text.

Yourcenar again accents Neville's sensuality by using the ellipsis in the phrase, "'Irai-je me promener sous les hêtres ou flaner le long de la rivière, où les arbres relflétés s'enlacent dans l'eau comme des amants?...'" (Vagues, p. 62/Waves, p. 52) Woolf ends this reflection with a simple question mark; yet Yourcenar stresses reverie and the sensual, sexual connotations of his remark by inserting a pause after this thought. The rhythm of his words is broken in mid-paragraph, and Neville is seen dreaming about lovers--his own or others. This happens yet a third time, in one of the final images which the reader sees of Neville. Woolf writes that he waits for one particular person to come to him. This shows his need for permanence and perfection. His statements are abrupt, separated by periods. He says, "'I cry, "Come in. Sit by me. Sit on the edge of the chair." Swept away by the old hallucination, I cry, "Come closer, closer."'" (Waves, p. 199) Yourcenar's Neville is hardly so direct, and does not seem to recognize the hallucination as something that is finite. Her translation is: "'Je m'écrie: "Entre. Assieds-toi près de moi. Assieds-toi sur le bras de ce fauteuil..." Repris par l'ancienne hallucination, je m'écrie : "Viens...Viens plus près..."'" (Vagues, p. 217) Neville's vision is drawn out by the final ellipsis and his character



is tied to seduction rather than urgency. The ellipses in the sentence add to the reader's vision of Neville as a sensual being. Woolf, however, chooses to portray him in terms of his own well-defined permanence.

Neville's character is not only made less clear by the constant reference to his sexuality; Yourcenar also takes away much of his power. In two very different, but very important instances, the reader sees Neville as powerless and fragile. This seems to be the characterization of the artist which Yourcenar alludes to in the preface, perhaps based on the image she formed of Woolf on seeing her. In the first instance, we see Neville coming to Bernard to confide in him. He is not a shy young man, but a person in search of answers about the nature of personality and the nature of his art. He asks, "'Am I a poet? Take it.'" and asserts to Bernard, "'the vulgarity of life (because I love it) shoots at you as I throw--catch it--my poem.'"

Yourcenar's translation is semantically accurate; yet we see how the added ellipses make the reader question Neville's strength in the situation: "'Suis-je un poète...tendez les mains.'" "'les vulgarités de la vie (car je l'aime, pourtant), tout cela jaillit comme un projectile, au moment où je vous jette le manuscrit de mon poème..."

"'Ramassez-le donc...'" (Vagues, p. 101/Waves, p. 88)

Yourcenar makes a separate paragraph of Neville's final words, putting time, space, and with these doubt, into this

section in which Woolf shows us Neville at his most scornful, most demanding and most confident. Yourcenar's Neville pauses before throwing his poem at Bernard, and with this hesitation shows us his indecisiveness. The importance of the event is lessened in Yourcenar's text.

Neville is also rendered powerless earlier in the book. Again, the scene is between Neville and Bernard; he has decided to come to Bernard to ask his opinion: "'Who am I?'" Yourcenar faithfully renders most of the decision process which leads to this; yet she does not translate two of Woolf's sentences. Neville makes the statement, "'Yet even as I feel this, I lash my frenzy higher and higher.'"

(Waves, p. 82) He senses his own emotion at his surroundings, and in order to achieve the most from his feeling, he pushes himself to the limit of emotion. He seems to recognize the falsity in this, but pursues this course to gain the experience. Yourcenar does not recognize this aspect of Neville's character; nor does she translate another sentence which conveys a similar form of self-understanding. She simply omits the phrase, "'There is some flaw in me--some fatal hesitancy which, if I pass it over, turns to foam and falsity.'" (Waves, p. 83) These phrases are crucial to the expression of Neville's irony. Even as he is going to Bernard to ask him who he is, he recognizes his own pretentiousness and accepts it in return for inspiration. Yourcenar takes this source of power away from

Neville. Self-recognition is a form of strength, and it seems that Yourcenar wishes to remove his strength in this area.

Finally, her additions to Neville's character are equally destructive. Woolf portrays Neville as "'dubious but elate,'" which Yourcenar translates as "'hésitant, mais plein d'orgueil.'" (Waves, p. 60/ Vagues, p. 71) Elate does not generally carry the connotation of being prideful. Woolf's characteristics starkly contrast, making him multifaceted. Yourcenar imbues him with two negative characteristics, making him a less admirable character. Finally, when Neville speaks of Percival's death, Woolf's character speaks of Percival in a very characteristic manner: "'And then, returning, 'See where he comes!' I said.'" Yourcenar renders this, "'Et puis, il revenait. Et je m'exclamais, car l'univers en lui reconnaissait son maître.'" (Vagues, p. 166/ Waves, p. 151) Yourcenar's Neville exaggerates the importance of Percival in order to make his love clear. This is, perhaps, what Woolf suggested to Yourcenar when Yourcenar asked what 'see where he comes' meant--that Neville saw Percival as the master of creation. Yet Yourcenar's choice to clarify this sacrifices the joy in Neville's character, and thus gives the reader an incomplete characterization.

Woolf's character of Jinny, even more so than her counterpart Neville, represents a person committed to



change. Jinny is a woman who lives by and for the body; she lives within the moment and waits for change. She is not reflective, not bent on self-interpretation. Unlike Neville, she is content with seeing many different people, and living through many different events. She does not search for the one, for she is self-sufficient. Thus, we see her with men--several--always changing, always looking for this man or that to pay attention to her body.

Yourcenar's Jinny captures these elemental aspects. Yet the rendering of Jinny, too, is flawed in many ways. The first flaw which we see is the translation of one of Jinny's early phrases. "'This is here,' said Jinny, 'this is now.'" later becomes, "'This is only here; this is only now.'" These words show the reader that Jinny is a creature of the moment. Yourcenar's translation shows this same idea to a certain extent yet it adds to it. She writes: "'Ce que vous dites, c'est vrai ici où nous sommes,' dit Jinny, 'c'est vrai en ce moment.'" and "'Ce que vous dites n'est vrai qu'ici où nous sommes; ce n'est vrai que maintenant.'" (Vagues, p. 31/Waves, p. 23)

We see a judgemental aspect of Jinny in Yourcenar's text which clearly is not present in Woolf's. Jinny is responding to one of Bernard's stories. Woolf allows the response to be nothing more than Jinny's reaction; it does not touch on the content of Bernard's story, but registers thought as it pertains to Jinny alone. Yourcenar's Jinny does judge, however, and focuses on some-

thing, or someone other than herself. This interaction of characters is very rare--the six characters remain almost entirely self-absorbed throughout the novel. Jinny is also one of the most self-absorbed characters. We see this in her relatively mild reaction to Percival's death. By changing the context in which we see these characteristics, Yourcenar changes the tone of Jinny's character.

Yourcenar also changes Jinny's perception of time, making the moment in which she lives of lesser importance to the reader. Yourcenar's translation of the scene of Jinny's "coming out" is replete with errors in the translator's judgement which change the focus on the moment. In this scene, we hear Jinny describe in very particular detail the night, the people, the way she feels in her dress (Waves, p. 100-105). The passage has the dazzle and glow of an exciting society occasion. Yet Yourcenar seems to have trouble with this passage. We see her trying to streamline Woolf's very descriptive prose by removing parts that seem redundant. We see her speeding up the sense of time as it is lived by Jinny, cutting short that moment of social recognition and the self-recognition that is the result for Jinny. She neglects a description of the night, perhaps because the emptiness of the streets has already been described. She does not translate the phrase "'There is no one coming or going in this street; the day is over.'" (Waves, p. 101/Vagues, p. 113) With this, the reader loses the empha-

sis of repetition which approaches poetry in Woolf's prose. We also miss the emphasis placed on the fact that Jinny is out in these lonely streets. Yourcenar also drops a part of Jinny's description of her own body, eliminating the phrase, "'My feet feel the pinch of shoes.'" (Waves, p. 101/Vagues, p. 114) This description is focal to Jinny because she feels the pressure of the situation in the pinch of shoes. This physical sense of containment represents the importance of the situation as well as its luxury. Jinny describes the silk on her knee, the stones at her throat, the red on her lips. The pinch of the shoes, then, attests once more to the importance of the event, as well as to its stringent social codes.

Yourcenar has also removed a reference to society's fascination with game-playing by not translating a part of Jinny's perception of the people around her. The phrase, "'They touch their waistcoats, their pocket handkerchiefs.'" is similarly omitted (Waves, p. 102/Vagues, p. 115). Again, it seems as if Yourcenar is trying to streamline Woolf's prose. Yet in removing such a phrase, the reader does not feel the full force of the situation's awkwardness. The need for Jinny to hold herself upright in the presence of these men who primp in public is not made as clear. As Yourcenar removes both time and tension, we notice an awkward skip from movement to judgement. The passage now reads, "'Leurs mains rajustent machinalement



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leurs cravates. Ils sont tres jeunes. Ils désirent faire bonne impression.'" Yet because Jinny's opinions are formed on the basis of the body alone, we lose an important moment in the text. A hesitation which Jinny would be sure to notice is ignored, and her ironic, slightly haughty attitude which is described in the following passage is somewhat less justified. Thus, we see Yourcenar changing the sense of time in the text to the detriment of yet another characterization.

It is with the character of Susan that Yourcenar seems to best translate the quality of the character as well as the words of the text. Yourcenar points out in the preface to her work that Susan--Suzanne in her text--is seen as an Earth Goddess, "la jeune Demeter." (Vagues, p. 10) Susan captures Yourcenar's imagination and the reader is treated to some very beautifully translated passages in which Susan explores her world. We see that the sense of time for this character is left more fully intact than it is for any other character. Susan's movement and development is slow, representing the formative time of growth and maturity. Yourcenar treats this with absolute respect, and when we read Susan's lullaby in the section of the book when she is an adult, we are truly reminded of the time and patience that is needed to coax a child to sleep. Woolf uses repetition in this section to enhance the trance-like state in which Susan finds herself. Rather than streamlining this

section, Yourcenar picks up on the repetition. She adds several sets of ellipses to the scene (Vagues, p. 186-189) to give the reader a sense of time passing, which is something that Woolf does not do; however, adding time to this passage only makes it more powerful.

The reader might contest the addition of the ellipsis in only one of Susan's speeches. The final scene of this adult section, where we see Susan at her sewing in the evening, contains the phrase "'a crack of sound starts in the rafter, and I push my thread through the needle and murmur, 'Sleep.''" Yourcenar adds time and interpretation to this scene by translating it, "'une pouture craque; et, tout en enfilant mon aiguille, je murmure, 'Dors, mon petit enfant...'" (Vagues, p. 189/Waves, p. 173) The final breath of the word "sleep" in Woolf's text seems to be coming from Susan in spite of herself, and is not necessarily directed at her child, nor at any person in particular. It seems to be at once a plea, a reaction, and an articulation of her position in life. She is tired, worn with caring for her husband and children, reacting mechanically to the necessity of lulling her child, and in what could be described as an intellectual sleep. Her life is repetitive, and the repetition of the word invokes that repetitiveness. By directing this comment to the child, Yourcenar takes away some of these qualities, even though the passage has been moving towards this very conclusion.



Yourcenar does fail to recognize one of Susan's dimensions: that of the danger which resides within her. Early in the book, we see how the "'yellow warmth in [her] side turned to stone'" when she recognized Jinny's outgoing nature. (Waves, p. 15) Yourcenar turns this "yellow warmth" into "mon foie" (Vagues, p. 23), but still acknowledges the painful change. Yet later in the text, Yourcenar seems to disregard the presence of this sinister thing, as if it had disappeared. Susan says, "'What I give is fell,'" when speaking of what she will bring to her marriage. Yourcenar changes the sense of the destructive, cruel, and deadly which "fell" contains into something much more innocuous when she translates this phrase as "'Ce que je sens est lourd.'" (Waves, p. 98/Vagues, p. 111) We might explain this as a confusion of "fell" with "feel" by the translator. Yet both authors follow this with the description of the children that she will have. Woolf places the comment "'I shall have children'" after the comment "'What has formed in me I shall give him,'" and this gives the reader the sense that Susan will give her husband something deadly in addition to giving him children--the reader has privileged information, and knows that there is a stone in the side of this woman, so to speak. Yourcenar's comment "'Je lui ferai don de tout ce qui a grandi en moi'" resounds only with the strains of motherhood--the stone is gone, she contains nothing dangerous, but only something heavy. It

must be a child, which is not dangerous, but a gift. In this way, Yourcenar clears up a fairly sinister, fairly obscure passage in Woolf's text; but, at the same time, she makes Susan a creature of one dimension. That dimension--the young Demeter--is portrayed brilliantly. But the presence of the destructive nature of childbirth and motherhood is swept away by Yourcenar's translation.

Louis' character is nearly as staid as that of Susan. And as with Susan, Yourcenar does a good job of translating Louis' personality. Louis' character represents control, and this control is generally reflected in the translated prose. She is very effective with Louis' character towards the end of the book. Yet in the beginning, we hear Yourcenar's Louis "murmur" (murmurer) his statements rather than "say" them (dire). The verb "to say" is used for all characters throughout Woolf's text, and this is Yourcenar's only divergence in the use of the verb. Because of this, the reader is immediately alerted that Louis is different in some way, and we see the implication that he is lesser than the others who speak their phrases aloud. This not true, in fact; nor is it what Woolf intended. Louis is ordered and self-conscious, but not to the point of murmuring his phrases below those of the others. Yourcenar does not carry this implied weakness through the text; she drops the use of the verb "murmurer" after Louis' first few speeches. It is important, too, to note that these first few speeches are

constructed to emphasize the pattern of the waves, for it is Louis who hears the "great beast stamping." It makes little sense for Yourcenar to have such an important image murmured, and the text itself gives no clues as to why she did this.

There is only one instance where the reader might feel that Yourcenar has carried Louis' weakness into the text. This, again, comes early in the work when Louis watches the Rector of the school during Chapel. Woolf sets the scene in this manner:

I rejoice, my heart expands in his bulk, in his authority. He lays the whirling dust clouds in my tremulous, my ignominiously agitated mind--how we danced round the Christmas tree and handing parcels they forgot me, and the fat woman said, "this little boy has no present," and gave me a shiny Union Jack from the top of the tree, and I cried with fury--to be remembered with pity. (Waves, p. 34-35)

Yet Yourcenar treats this same scene in a slightly different manner:

Sa masse, son autorité m'enchantent, me dilatent le coeur. Il dissipe les tourbillons de poussière dans mon esprit tremblant, honteusement agité, et les souvenirs des danses autour de l'arbre de Noël, et de cadeaux enveloppés de papier. On avait oublié le mien, et la grosse femme s'écria: "Ce petit garçon n'a pas de cadeau..." Elle me donna un drapeau anglais tout luisant qui pendait au sommet de l'arbre, et je me mis à pleurer de rage. Souvenirs pitoyables. (Vagues, p. 44)

Yourcenar's Louis in this scene seems to be remembering the Christmas with pity for himself as a child. The rage that he expresses seems more to be at the lack of a gift than it



is for the fat woman's pity. Woolf's wording is vague enough to encompass both sadness at the memory and rage for the pity extended. Louis' pride and egotism is far more pronounced in Woolf's text. We see his determination and feel his frustration, rather than seeing self pity in his character.

This weakness of self-pity does not carry through the text, and this is why it is so very puzzling. Louis' self-consciousness turns to scorn and pride in his later life, and Yourcenar reflects this quite well at the end of the text. We see Louis a successful businessman who says, "'I have signed my name...already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands.'" (Waves, p. 167) Yourcenar catches the power that this statement contains in her translation, "'Ce matin, dit Louis, j'ai déjà donné vingt signatures. Net, ferme, simple, mon nom s'étale devant moi.'" (Vagues, p. 182) Although Yourcenar does not translate the repetitive sentence, "'I, and again I, and again I,'" the reader feels a similar effect in her use of the phrase "'mon nom s'étale devant moi.'" When Yourcenar is confronted with this same repetitive sentence later in this section, she does render it very nicely, translating it "'Louis, Louis, et toujours Louis.'" (Vagues, p. 186) This is a brilliant compromise for what would be an awkward use of "je" three times within a single phrase. Since Louis' name appears in the first

sentence, its repetition there would be less effective. Therefore, Yourcenar showed good judgement in compromising with the first repetition and using the second to its fullest extent. The result is a Louis who possesses the self-centeredness and pride that Woolf intended.

Yourcenar creates the character of Rhoda almost as an exaggeration of Woolf's intended character. Rhoda is a woman who lives outside of life, waiting to retreat into her own world at the end of the day. Perhaps Yourcenar has the most difficulty with this character because of the obscure nature of almost every one of her sentences. Rhoda speaks in a language taken directly from the illogical world of dreams and fantasies. Yourcenar picks up on this and creates a character who never varies from this tone, but displays a personality constantly bordering on paranoia. As with Neville, Yourcenar stresses the single facet of Rhoda which she feels is most important in places where Woolf has chosen not to do so. While she uses Rhoda's language with a general accuracy, the question of timing again becomes important. The constant use of ellipses in Rhoda's speech makes the reader feel that Yourcenar is unsure of her characterization, and that she would rather allow Rhoda to become an exaggeration of a single state of mind than capture her subtle nuances of personality.

We see one example of this vague characterization in a scene where the child Rhoda is in bed for the night. She

says,

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. (Waves, p. 28)

Yourcenar gives this passage a distinctly different flavor in her translation:

Oh! si je pouvais m'éveiller de mes rêves...Tiens! voilà ma commode. Il faut que je tache de sortir de l'eau, mais les vagues s'entassent sur moi; elles me roulent entre leurs larges épaules; je suis renversée; je tombe; je suis étendue parmi ces longues lumières, parmi ces longues vagues, dans les allées sans fin où des gens me poursuivent, me poursuivent... (Vagues, p. 36)

Rhoda, in Yourcenar's text, accents both the impossibility of waking from her dreams and the paranoia that she feels in her dream-state, whereas Woolf's Rhoda could be seen simply as a woman overcome by sleep. Yourcenar's first use of the ellipsis allows the reader to perceive that to awake from dreaming is not possible, or that if it is, it will take an unspecified amount of time. This has implications for Rhoda later in the text, for we never see Yourcenar's Rhoda fully "wake" from this dream state. The impossibility becomes reality. If we can correctly read this as the implication of the first set of ellipsis, then the second set implies that Rhoda will always feel pursued. This is accurate; however, for this type of implication to appear so early in the work condemns the character to her end in the reader's



eyes before she has fully developed. Because the characters must be seen through the duration of the novel, the translator has intruded, and brought the character's end into the process of her development. Woolf leaves these phrases open ended, the gerund implying either the pursuit of Rhoda, or the generalized, aimless pursuit that many people make. Yourcenar has taken this possibility out of the text, and added Rhoda's final mental state to the beginning of the novel.

This same added interpretation appears in yet another instance with equally disturbing results. Woolf uses Rhoda to bring the image of the puddle to her audience--one of the childhood images which haunts her. Rhoda says,

Also, in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay the grey puddle in the courtyard, when, holding an envelope in my hand, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather. I was wafted down tunnels. Then, very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle. This is life then to which I am committed. (Waves, p. 64)

Yourcenar renders this:

Et, tout au milieu, il y a eu aussi l'horrible flaque grise et cadavérique de la cour, près de laquelle je suis passée, un enveloppe à la main, le jour où l'on m'a envoyée porter un message. Je suis arrivée au bord de la mort. Mon sens de l'identité m'a fait défaut. Nous n'existons pas, me suis-je écriée, et je suis tombée. Je me suis sentie emportée comme une plume; je flottais sous des voûtes. Puis, doucement, j'ai posé le pied par-delà la flaque. J'ai appuyée ma main à un mur de brique. Je suis retournée en arrière avec une

peine infinie, me trainant de nouveau au fond de mon propre corps au-dessus de l'étendue grise et cadavérique de la flaque. Voilà la vie que je suis obligée de vivre. (Vagues, p. 74)

Here, we see Yourcenar use the same short sentences as Woolf. The time has the same force--it is not lengthened or curtailed. Yet Yourcenar changes the sense of the text by changing the translation of a single word. Where Woolf's Rhoda says "'I came to the puddle,'" Yourcenar's says "'Je suis arrivée au bord de la mort.'" The puddle becomes more than a puddle; it becomes death. The remainder of the paragraph cannot be read in the same context. It becomes a struggle with spiritual death, rather than a struggle with reality. It is a spiritual duel, rather than a fight to realize the life that one is living. And the dual meaning of Woolf's final sentence is abolished completely: the phrase no longer means that this is life, and I am committed to it. It only means this is the life which I must lead. Yourcenar has shown Rhoda as taken by her hallucination, whereas Woolf uses an image which suggests the duel with death, but retains the surface description of a struggle with identity. Yourcenar's text becomes confusing here, for she picks up the image of the puddle at the end of the paragraph. During the first sentences, we feel that we hear Rhoda's true feelings; yet these are interpretation added by the translator. The interpretation of the image is absolutely legitimate; but the explanation does not appear in Woolf's text. Rhoda does not interpret the scenes in her

own life for the reader. In this way, Yourcenar's first instinct as a reader of the text to clear up this obscure image by adding interpretation muddies the characterization of Rhoda.

The translation of Rhoda's speeches have several other problems which yield similarly confused characterization.<sup>18</sup> In short, Rhoda has become a caricature rather than a character; she represents the madwoman within the person, as obsessive as Neville, but more blatantly confused. This confusion seems to be the watchword for Yourcenar's translations of character. It is disturbing to see a translator design the words of a text so well, but neglect to design the idea upon which a character is built. Translation extends into the translation of the sense of a character's life. It is not surprising to find, then, that Yourcenar also makes major mistakes in the characterization of perhaps the most important character, Bernard. Bernard is not focal because he is superior to the other characters. His importance lies in his ability to fix the others in time, to "sum up," as he does at the end of the work. Bernard's fixity in life, in his phrases, in what he "says," seems to shed light on each of the other characters in turn. They, themselves, do not focus around Bernard; but Bernard makes them his focus and thus brings continuity to the novel. Yourcenar's Bernard has several characteristics which do not allow him to do this fully. Both Yourcenar's use of time and word



undergoing. When one of her characters ceases to speak, they seem to cease to think. Indeed, it seems as if they no longer exist. Yet Yourcenar's pauses allow for the character not to be lost, but to just be taking a pause. It is almost as if she feels that the characters must be sustained through all the time in the novel. Woolf begins a new paragraph with the next thought, as does Yourcenar. Yet Woolf's new paragraph suggests that Bernard has found a new train of thought; Yourcenar's could mean this, or could mean that the pause just interrupted Bernard, for this is the result of the ellipses within the paragraphs themselves.

When we speak of precision of language, we must also speak of the precision of image, for it is with both image and language that the character of Bernard is concerned. We often find that Yourcenar's Bernard is weaker in establishing the images which are important to the text. For example, one of the most important images in the book is given to him in his final "summing up," only to be misrepresented in the translation. He says,

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.

Yourcenar translates this:

Quoique je fasse, je ne parviens à extraire du chaudron que quelques phrases, quelques petits poissons, mais des millions d'autres me glissent entre les doigts, tout frétillements, et remplissent la marmite d'un bouillonnement d'argent. (Waves, p.

In this phrase, we see the image of the six fish in Woolf's text as central to the theme of the work. The characters themselves are the fish, caught by Bernard, who sums up their lives in this final section. Bernard not only evokes the importance of the six who must stay together, but the importance of the millions of others who slip away.

Yourcenar's image, because it relies on the vague reference to "quelques" for both "phrases" and "poissons" takes away much of the importance of the others as well as excluding the reference to the six characters. The characters are unified--and united with the millions of others--by Woolf's prose. Yourcenar's lack of fidelity to the image has dismissed Bernard's ability to make this link. His character, here, suffers the fate of the other characters,  
19  
becoming more vague than Woolf had intended.

Of course, perhaps the most important image of the book is the final image of Bernard's determination in the face of his enemy, Death. Woolf's Bernard ends the novel on a characteristically strong note of defiance. He says, "'Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!'" which Yourcenar renders as "'Invaincu, incapable de demander grâce, c'est contre toi que je m'élançe, O Mort...'" (Waves, p. 297/Vagues, p. 318) Yourcenar's ending can be challenged on a number of counts. The first is the use of the words "incapable de demander

gr<sup>4</sup>ace" as a translation of "unyielding." The quality of obduracy is not properly conveyed by an inability to ask for mercy or forgiveness. "Unyielding" might be more accurately rendered as "inflexible," for example. Yourcenar, then, adds a quality of vagueness to Bernard's character when he is at his strongest, just as she did with Neville. Perhaps this is because of the formidable nature of his opponent; Yourcenar also allows Bernard to flinch at the ending, having him trail off in a statement closed by her ever-present ellipsis. Yet Woolf's Bernard does not flinch. Not only does the ellipsis suggest that Bernard's resolve to throw himself into the face of Death has waned; it also suggests that the time elapsed between this decision and the final words, "The waves broke on the shore," is more than a moment; it could be years. Thus, time, passion, and expression at the end of the novel fall flat, because of the added interpretation of the translator.

Having looked at each of the characters individually, and having seen how Yourcenar changes each one of them, it is perhaps wise to look at the character of the narrator in the work. The "speeches" of each character are reported in the pure past tense by a narrator. The words, "Bernard said," or "Jinny said" are the only remainders of a persona that Woolf made great effort to remove. She had a difficult time establishing the place of the narrator. September 25, 1929, she writes of The Waves, (then The Moths) "who thinks



it? And am I outside the thinker? One wants some device which is not a trick." (VWD 3, p. 257) Because the characters are a product of such an obscure narrator, it is very easy to see why Yourcenar might have added commentary to these reported speeches in order to clarify what she thought to be evasive sections of the novel. It is by looking carefully at the character of the narrator in The Waves that we can find one explanation for the changes made in the translation.

John Graham suggests that the novel is a

verbatim translation of speeches by six different speakers: the subject matter alters, the attitudes of the speakers vary, they have their characteristic images and expressions, which the translator faithfully mirrors; but the words we actually hear are his, and strongly colored by nuances and rhythms of his own vocabulary and voice.<sup>20</sup>

This reading is very plausible, especially when we consider Woolf's obvious desire to remain outside of the work and allow the characters, scenes and events to create the whole of the novel. The pure present used by the characters in their speeches, (I go, I see, I sign) suspends the time of the speeches. We think of the characters only within the present tense as we read through the work, creating a picture of the action of their lives in our minds. The fact that this pure present is reported in the pure past tense, ie: "'I see a ring,' said Bernard,'" allows the reader to focus almost purely on the character, without realizing that the character is the function of a narrator. The narrator

has no voice. Had Woolf used a conventional narrator to describe the characters, rather than one who merely reports their speech, we might not have seen each character so clearly; nor would we have had the illusion of present action in the text. Therefore, the position of the narrator, though obscured, is an important one. It is the thread which unites the characters. Although Bernard "sums up," and although he does unite the characters by very often making them the focus of his speeches, we clearly see that he is not the narrator, for his final speech is reported as are all of the others.

We must come to the conclusion that the position of the narrator could be filled by no other than the creator of the novel: Woolf. The narrator creates the story, expressing the voices of the characters in her own language. This results in very little variation in vocabulary from the beginning of the novel--when the characters are young--to its end. The educated, eloquent tone of the words used is easily recognizable as Woolf's preferred style of prose. The images are easily recognizable as the images dear to Woolf's mind. Similarly, the tone of the words in the translation is that of another narrator: Yourcenar. Yourcenar vies with Woolf in the translation for the control of the characters; the result is the inconsistency that we have seen. Yourcenar is not reproducing the novel, but re-creating it. She seems to be involved in trying to clarify,

and in trying to usurp the power of the original narrator/creator in her translation.

Because Yourcenar overpowers the voice of the original narrator, we hear the words that this persona speaks differently and notice the difference in the way that the narrator orders the world. In tandem with the characters, the narrator represents both unity and individuality. Guiguet speaks of the voice as one that "speaks through no mouth, has no individual timbre, does not use the language of everyday...the characters are really a single being in search of voices. These voices originally merged in one single voice, the thinker she." <sup>21</sup> When Yourcenar changes this voice, adding her own timbre, her own explanations and her own interpretations, both the sense of unity and the sense of individuality are altered. For example, when Yourcenar's narrator had Rhoda "say" that she came to the brink of death rather than to the brink of a puddle, we saw Rhoda in a different light. Not only was she torn away from any contact she had with the reality in which all of the other characters existed, but she was also labeled a madwoman. Thus, her character changed as it related to the unified group of characters and also as an individual. What is more, the added interpretation is one with which only the readers and the narrator are familiar. Rhoda, herself, would not be familiar with this interpretation, and she would not express it in this manner. In this way, the



narrator gains powerful control of both individual "speech" and group perception of reality.

This control also becomes problematic because it contradicts the order of Woolf's text. Order, for her, is imposed from without. The structure of the speeches is determined by the narrator, and the work is contained by a structure of natural cycles which are played out in the interludes. The characters lead lives which are only fragmentary; there is no structure which emerges from the speeches themselves. The sense of time passing is given only by the cycles of the interludes and the evidence that the characters age. The lives of the characters play off of each other, and it is the narrator who arranges them into what seems to be the full story of six lives. We must realize that we are privy to this information only because of the narrator's power of memory, and that the characters themselves do not have the capacity to order this text. They have no memory, but are only remembered by the narrator; and, in order to bring forth a full story, all of the fragments of their lives must be considered as one.

Yourcenar, by satisfying what Delattre calls a "désir d'expliquer, parfois même de commenter, au lieu de traduire<sup>22</sup> seulement," changes this order. It is as if Yourcenar wishes to obtain order and an explanation of the events from the characters themselves, rather than relying upon the voices to form a whole without explanation. Because she

cannot find the capability to order and explain within the speeches of the characters, she, as the narrator/creator must add what is necessary for this. Yourcenar separates these characters, as we have seen, even physically separating their speeches; and she adds the interpretative voice of the narrator into the characters voices. The result is, as we have seen, a novel which has much surface beauty, but which lacks the cohesion of the original.

This cohesion also depends upon the use of time in the novel, and we have seen that Yourcenar changes this with great regularity. Because of the illusion of immediacy in the work, created by the unique use of verb tense, we are only semi-conscious of the sense of time in the novel. Most of this sense comes to us through the structure of the novel, especially in the interludes which mark time in terms of the times of day. We correlate sunrise with youth, noon with middle age, sunset with death. Events in the novel are generalized, and places do not properly exist in space or time. It is the views of the characters which form the world around them, and this world is absolutely subjective. Because of this, time is compressed in Woolf's novel. We see bits of time, moments of sunrise, noon, or sunset. We do not see any single action in its duration, for all action is past action, being "said" by the characters and reported by the narrator. Action, then, becomes identified with the effect that that action had on

the lives of the characters. Woolf suggests this compression in her diary in December, 1930:

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 don't 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. (VWD, 3, p. 343)

Woolf's time is not time at all; it is a sense of flow, a rhythm. It is the rhythm of the waves, where events and characters only rarely pause.

Yourcenar changes this sense of constant continuation with her use of ellipses. They are used with every character in the text and bring well over three hundred unintended pauses into Woolf's work. By adding time to so many of the characters' speeches in this way, she is adding duration to the novel. Yourcenar is conceiving of the past which is being spoken as if it were being acted; this is not so. Woolf uses periods to bring finality to any comment or description. For example, Bernard remarks that "'People have gone home. Now how comforting it is to watch the lights coming out in the bedrooms of small shopkeepers on the other side of the river. There is one--there is another.'" Woolf does not make recognition of the time that it takes for lights to come out, because although we hear this as if it were presently taking place, it is in fact taking place in the past. Yourcenar, then, changes the



compressed nature of this phrase, rendering it, "Les gens sont rentrés chez eux. C'est rassurant de voir s'éclairer les fenêtres de petits boutiquiers de l'autre côté de la rivière...les chambres à coucher s'éclairent l'une après l'autre." (Waves, p. 233/Vagues, p. 252) Yourcenar's use of ellipsis focuses the reader's attention on the duration of the action, rather than on the effect which that action had on Bernard. Woolf does not seem to see time as important. Rather, it is the effect of the moment remembered which has power for her characters. The constant addition of time disrupts the flow and rhythm which Woolf sought in her text.

Because we see Yourcenar as a translator who has made such substantial changes to a text that this text is changed on its deepest levels, we must consider the effect that this has on our view of translation itself. Gullace rightly says that "There is no science of translation which can offer infallible rules to follow; there is no theoretical knowledge which can illuminate the translator. He is alone in front of a text, with no intermediaries." The way that a translator approaches a text, then, seems to be a function of what type of translator that person is. Lefevere suggests that the translator can be one who is "a union of translator and literary scientist, of re-creative artist and universally educated scholar." This type of translator is not a critic of the text, nor is she trying to re-write the

text, but is one who simply wishes to make works of other languages available in her own tongue. This translator offers no readings of a work, but translates using the broadest possible background of history and literature. Lefevere believes that this is fundamental to good translation. If a translator moves away from this broad background and begins to create texts which harbor readings, polyinterpretability becomes a serious issue. As we have seen, this is an issue in Yourcenar's text.

Haskell Block suggests, however, that some of the finest translations are the products of one creative writer translating another's work. He realizes that the writer may be less devoted to the text she is translating than she is to her own work, for he writes, "The claims of one's own creation almost always take precedence over those of others."<sup>25</sup> Block favors what might be termed "artistic translating," suggesting that "Translation in the hands of gifted writers is not reproduction, but creation..."<sup>26</sup> and that this is desirable. Yet even Gullace, who stresses the lack of theoretical rules for translation, also admits that "Translation must not obliterate the original."<sup>27</sup> If Block sees the practice of artistic translation as desirable, we must question him on the grounds that this poses a problem for the definition of translation. It is not primarily creative, for the translator is bound to a text which has already been created. If it becomes primarily creative, as

we have seen with Yourcenar's text, the consideration of the intent of the original is obscured, if not obliterated completely. In a creation such as Woolf's, where the themes and images used are so very close to the author's personal beliefs, accuracy in reproduction is crucial for an understanding of the author's work. Where the author is essentially creator, the translator must not be. This is the fundamental problem in Yourcenar's translation.

Yourcenar speaks of the act of translation in a knowledgeable tone, calling up the image of the translator as someone packing for a long trip: she chooses something, then casts it aside, only to replace it later, claiming that it is absolutely essential.<sup>28</sup> She recognizes the problems which all translation poses, saying "absolute accuracy is impossible. One does the best one can to capture the sound of another spirit and to avoid misrepresentation."<sup>29</sup> Yet when discussing Yourcenar and her relationship to translation, Jean Darbelnet makes it a point to refer us to her profession as a writer and to say that a writer can and will exercise her own style when doing a translation. He cites Hilaire Belloc who allows for modification of the original in translation "des l'instant que sa traduction gagne en naturel et en exactitude."<sup>30</sup> Also, Darbelnet suggests that "la traduction n'est pas indigne d'un écrivain, qui peut y trouver, justement, l'occasion d'exercer ses dons d'une façon, somme toute, peu différent



de sa manière habituelle."<sup>31</sup> It would seem that many critics excuse freedom of style because of Yourcenar's position as a great writer. Although Yourcenar, herself, never makes this excuse, we see that changes have been made to Woolf's text, and that Yourcenar has, indeed, confused her role as creator with that of translator.

With this in mind, we can safely say that a line must be drawn between the professions of translator and writer. It is true that without creativity, a translator would be only second rate. Yet without the discipline to remain true to the original, a translator traduces the original text. Lefevere analyzes the problem quite clearly: "The problem of fidelity raises two main questions for the translator: fidelity to the author's thought and style, or fidelity to the particular character of the host language? Which should take precedence?"<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that for Marguerite Yourcenar, the clarity and beauty of the text in the host language took precedence over the reproduction of themes and images which were most crucial to the original text. What the comparative reader is presented with is a stunning rendition of the poetry in Woolf's text, with some moments of truly inspired work on the part of the translator. Yet, in the main, Yourcenar has sacrificed the essence of Woolf's characters and the fundamental ideas behind the artistic use of time and narrator in The Waves in order to gain control of the text as its creator. Les Vagues is a worthy text,

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With this in mind, we can safely say that a line must be drawn between the professions of translator and writer. It is true that without creativity, a translator would be only second rate. Yet without the discipline to remain true to the original, a translator is also only second rate.

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and a fine work done by a writer early in her career; yet it was done by a writer who traded clarity for the passion that marks Woolf's original text. Yourcenar states, "I hope that my technical experiments won't even be noticed. If one notices that the dancers are always counting their steps, then one musn't be very taken with the dance."<sup>33</sup> Yet we cannot change the steps of a dance and have it remain the same dance. So, Yourcenar cannot fundamentally change the qualities of The Waves and expect that change to go unnoticed.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Virginia Woolf, The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 4, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), p. 10. All further references to this text will be made in text as VWD, volume number and page number.

<sup>2</sup>See VWD 4, Tuesday, 20 January, 1931 as well as Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 156-157.

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," Moments of Being, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), p. 64.

<sup>4</sup>Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in The Common Reader (New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1925), p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Woolf, Moments of Being, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup>Jean Guiguet, letter to Amy L. Cooper, March 7, 1988.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Goldhammer, trans. With Open Eyes, by Marguerite Yourcenar (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 161.

<sup>8</sup>Marguerite Yourcenar, letter to Amy L. Cooper, September 2, 1987.

<sup>9</sup>Goldhammer, With Open Eyes, p. 161-162.

<sup>10</sup>Marguerite Yourcenar, trans. Les Vagues, by Virginia Woolf (Paris: Stock, 1937), p. 12-13. Companion listings will hereafter be made with Virginia Woolf, The Waves, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1931). The listings will be given as Vagues, page number/Waves, page number, or a listing of either title standing alone with page number. Listings will be made within the text.

<sup>11</sup>Goldhammer, With Open Eyes, p. 161.

<sup>12</sup>Yourcenar, letter to Amy L. Cooper.

<sup>13</sup>Floris Delattre, "Compte Rendu Critique de Virginia Woolf: Les Vagues," Etudes Anglaises, avril-juin (1938), p. 201.

<sup>14</sup>This is discussed in detail in an article of the Bulletin Budé by E. De Saint-Denis, entitled "Avec Marguerite Yourcenar: Apprendre à Traduire." The title is

deceptive, however, and a more thorough discussion of Yourcenar's actions as a translator can be found in With Open Eyes, "The Art of Translating," pp. 157-165.

<sup>15</sup>Robert G. Collins, Virginia Woolf's Black Arrows of Sensation: The Waves (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, LTD., 1962), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, The Three-fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf (London: Moulton and Co., 1965), p. 158.

<sup>17</sup>Allen McLaurin, "The Double Nature of Repetition: The Waves," in Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 140.

<sup>18</sup>We also see Rhoda as a mentally ill woman when Yourcenar makes an unfortunate mistranslation. For the phrase "'I have to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to the body'" (Waves, p. 44), Yourcenar gives the translation "'Je suis forcée de me cogner la tête contre une porte bien dur, pour me contraindre à rentrer dans mon propre corps.'" (Vagues, p. 54) This show of violence which borders on self-punishment is not at all characteristic of Rhoda. The mistake, though simple, gives the reader a picture more appropriate to an asylum of the crazed woman hitting her head on a door. This is hardly the image of Rhoda that Woolf intended.

<sup>19</sup>As we saw with Rhoda, we find a mistranslation in one of Bernard's phrases which also results in a problematic interpretation of his character. Bernard, in his description of "the world without a self" says, "'Blindness returns as one moves and one leaf repeats another.'" (Waves, p. 287) Yourcenar mistranslates this, adding what seems to be her own critical comment about the novel: "'On redevient aveugle, et on trouve que le livre se répète un peu.'" (Vagues, p. 307) Because this comes so close to the end of the novel, it seems possible that Yourcenar could be doing her own "summing up" of the translation experience. Because the word "livre" is so out of place in this passage about Bernard's experience in a garden, we have very little choice but to turn this comment back onto the work itself. This mistranslation then becomes indicative both of Yourcenar's attitude towards the work and the lack of precision which she gives to Bernard's use of language.

<sup>20</sup>John Graham, "Point of View in The Waves: Some Services of Style," University of Toronto Quarterly, 39, no. 3 (1970), p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Guiguet, "The Waves," in Critics on Virginia Woolf, ed. Jacqueline E.M. Latham (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1979), pp. 88-89.

<sup>22</sup> Delattre, p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni Gullace, "Translation: A Humanist's Reflection and Experience," in Translation Perspectives: Selected Papers, 1982-83, ed. Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Andreas Huyssen as quoted in Andre Lefevere, "Beyond the Process: Literary Translation in Literature and Literary Theory," in Translation Spectrum, ed. Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> Haskell M. Block, "The Writer as Translator: Nerval, Baudelaire, Gide," in Translation Spectrum, ed. Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 116.

<sup>26</sup> Block, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Gullace, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> See With Open Eyes, p. 157-165.

<sup>29</sup> Goldhammer, With Open Eyes, p. 151.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Darbelnet, "Marguerite Yourcenar et la Traduction Litteraire," Etudes Litteraires, 12, no. 1 (1979), p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Darbelnet, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Lefevere, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> Goldhammer, With Open Eyes, p. 165.



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