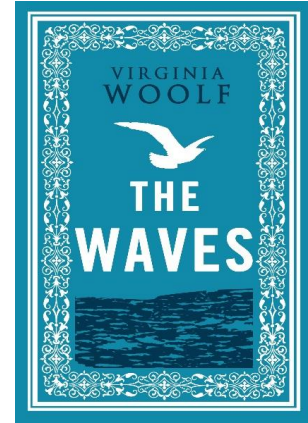


## BOOK GROUP 2 NOVEMBER 2022

### THE WAVES – VIRGINIA WOOLF

This book was written in a “stream of consciousness” style which required a continuous level of concentration! It is the story of six people, Susan, Jinny, Rhoda, Bernard, Neville and Louis growing up and growing older, meeting intermittently as students and later in adulthood and showing the effect in their lives of the relationships between them. There is also a seventh character whom we never meet – Percival, who was clearly a hero in different ways to the other six but who is killed in a riding accident abroad whilst still young. His death clearly impacts on all of them, particularly Neville who was in love with him and he is referred to on each occasion the other six meet.



The theme of the waves is a symbol of the fluidity and passing of time and Woolf intersperses the book at regular intervals with italicised prose sections which describe the scenes of waves rolling in at different times of the day from early morning to night. These passages are beautifully written and symbolise life’s progress from birth to old age and death. Woolf’s sister, Vanessa Bell, was an artist in the Bloomsbury group which Woolf belonged to and some of her descriptions of the way light and shadow affects the absolute look of things are quite stunning. “Watching the rain glisten on the tiles till they shine like a policeman’s waterproof”, “the thin skinned milk of early morning turns opal, blue, rose” .

Susan becomes a mother with a more or less contented life in the country; Jinny, an honest exhibitionist, narcissist and upper class prostitute; Rhoda, harder to describe, a free spirit who becomes Bernard’s lover at one time but leaves him and eventually commits suicide; Bernard the storyteller, self-confessed romantic, moody Byronesque figure full of phrases he can never satisfactorily develop into poetry “I must open this little trapdoor and let out these linked phrases”; Neville, a gay man who yearns for love and Louis the Australian, the cleverest of them all, who goes into commerce and has an inferiority complex cleverly outlined in the repeated phrase when asked about his background “my father is a banker in Brisbane”. The others are clearly of the British upper class and there is no reference to ordinary people. This is reflected in the somewhat arrogant, condescending style of someone of that class and era.

The rhythm of the writing reminded one member of the group of T. S. Eliot’s poetry and the group spent some time discussing this with a few examples read out. We concluded that “The Waves” required more time and effort but that there are too many other books to read!

And finally, one of our members said “I rarely feel defeated. The diversion to discussing TS Eliot brought some sanity to our understanding. Yes I enjoyed the Waves prose and beautiful descriptions but for me there was just too much to take in and looking back 50

years ago when I first had a go , things have changed but I now just feel a bit too old to totally take on board the youthful and intense optimism of such a youthful perspective!”

Christine Wright