

広島大学学術情報リポジトリ

Hiroshima University Institutional Repository

Title	The Parallels between Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud: Mourning, Melancholia and the Death Instinct in Virginia Woolf' s The Waves
Author(s)	Matsuzaki, Shoto
Citation	Hiroshima studies in English language and literature , 64 : 66 - 67
Issue Date	2020-03-30
DOI	
Self DOI	
URL	https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00049026
Right	著作権は、執筆者本人と広島大学英文学会に帰属するものとします。
Relation	



The Parallels between Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud:
Mourning, Melancholia and the Death Instinct in Virginia Woolf's
The Waves

Shoto Matsuzaki

A distinctive feature of the works of Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) is her emphasis on ‘coherence and detachment’, or the contrast between a sense of unity and of separateness between individuals. This theme is depicted through the parties held by Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Especially, Woolf seems to explore the theme of ‘coherence and detachment’ in *The Waves* (1931). This work is developed as a series of ‘dramatic soliloquies’ composed of Bernard’s, Neville’s, Louis’s, Susan’s, Jinny’s and Rhoda’s memories and reflections, and the novel is composed of ten sections. The story is about these six characters’ lives from their childhood to their old age, and the Interludes which depict the landscape from sunrise to sunset parallel the characters’ consciousness of the flow of time. For example, the last section, whose interlude begins at sunset, is the story of the death of the old Bernard. *The Waves* develops its story, centering on the seventh character, Percival, who dies in India in the central part of the novel. He functions as a leader of the six characters, so that half of this work, depicting the world after his accidental death, represents their reactions to his death and their struggle to live without him.

The theme of ‘coherence and detachment’ is also treated in the theory of the ‘death instinct’ advocated by Sigmund Freud. Freud speculates on the existence of a ‘death instinct’, which has a regressive character, in order to explain the repetition of the unpleasurable experience found in his grandson’s game, ‘Fort-Da’, as well as the condition of patients suffering from war neurosis and melancholy, and consequently states that the ‘death instinct’ involves an unconscious wish to return to an earlier state, that is, an inanimate state—a state of unity preceding the development of individual consciousness. However, although the ‘death instinct’ literally suggests the idea of their practical death, it in fact secretly produces a masochistic pleasure through the

repetition of unpleasurable experience. Therefore, Fuhito Endo and Leo Bersani connect the 'death instinct' to the idea of 'self-shattering'. *The Waves* explores the theme of 'coherence and detachment' especially clearly through the central and illusion-like figure, Percival. The motif of 'coherence and detachment' and the quality of 'self-shattering' are evoked through the depiction of the characters' state of being filled with a sense of unity—which I interpret as expressing their organic unity—at the farewell party for Percival, though the characters are separated before the meeting and live separated lives after his death. Moreover, the self-destruction or the self-shattering is represented by the characters' mourning and their melancholic mental state.

Hence, I will explore Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* in terms of 'mourning' and 'melancholia', which can be seen as aspects of the 'death instinct' and Freud's theories about it, focusing on the characters' reactions to Percival's death. In other words, I aim to reveal the strong affinity between Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and Sigmund Freud's theory of the 'death instinct' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.