



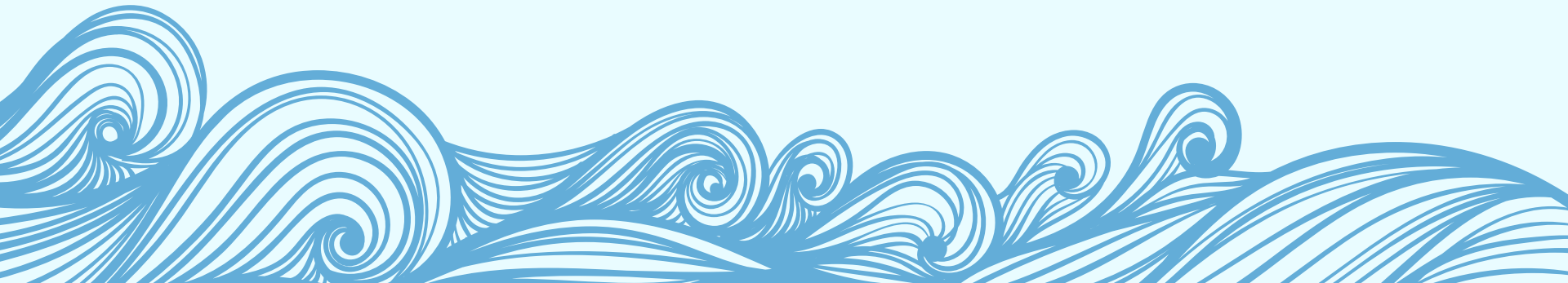
A Window on Intimacy: The Phantasmagorical Figure of the “Lady Writing” in *The Waves* (1931)

International Conference
“Virginia Woolf: For a Poetics & Politics of Intimacy”
May 11-12, 2023 - Université Jean Monnet, Saint-Etienne, France

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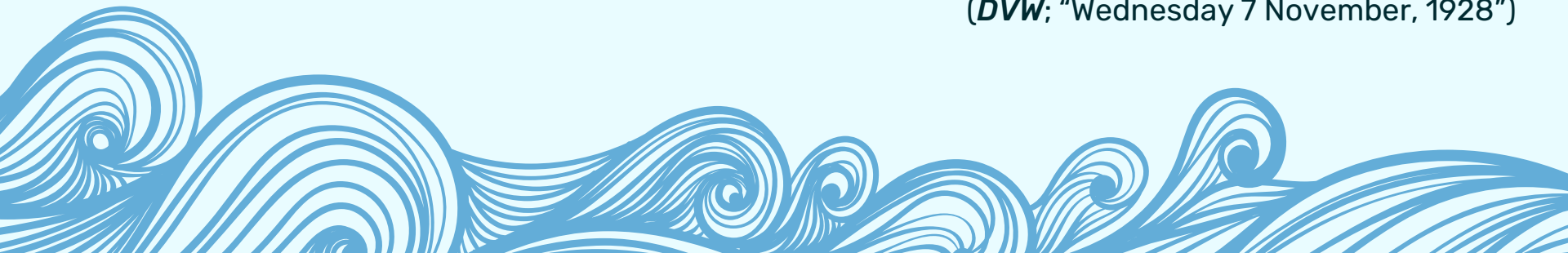
“Put your foot on this brick. Look over the wall. That is Elvedon. **The lady sits between the two long windows, writing.**” (TW 11)



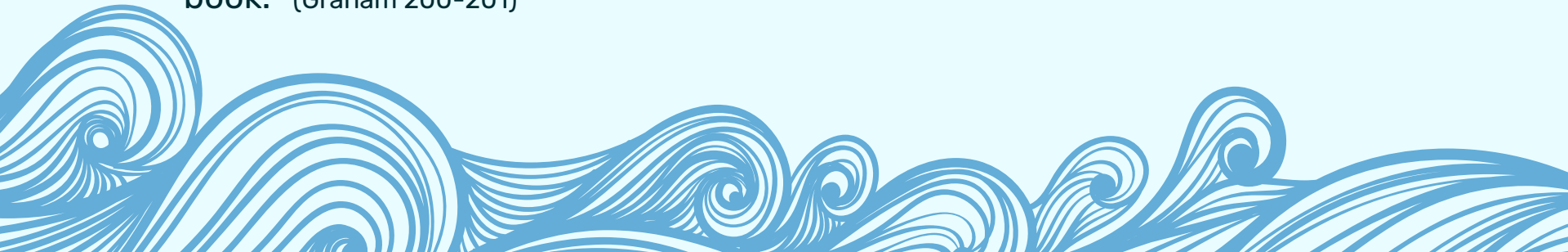
“At intervals I begin to think [...] of **a solitary woman shaping a book** of ideas about life.” (Bell 112; 30 October, 1926)

“Yes, but *The Moths* [the initial title of *The Waves*]?
That was to be **an abstract mystical eyeless book:**
a playpoem.”

(*DVW*; “Wednesday 7 November, 1928”)



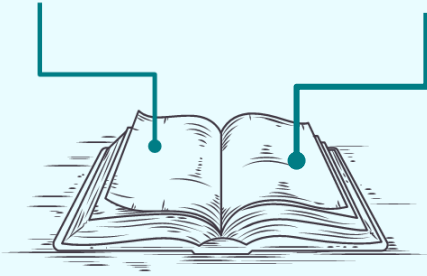
“[T]he struggle with the point of view in the early stages of composition can only mean that, **although there were obvious reasons for abandoning the narrator [*i.e.* this woman writing], there were less obvious but potent reasons for trying to keep her. [...]** Why, then, did she [Woolf] engage in this long struggle to incorporate into *The Waves* a first-person narrator [Bernard? The lady writing?], when it would seem that her purposes might be served just as well by writing from the point of view which she had mastered so well? **The answer must be [...] that she had a powerful motive** for seeking to make certain features of a first-person narrative the controlling point of view in this book.” (Graham 200-201)



The Waves (1931)

The “Interludes”

The “Dramatic Soliloquies”



‘I see a ring,’ said **Bernard**, [...]

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said **Susan**, [...]

‘I hear a sound,’ said **Rhoda** [...]

‘I see a globe,’ said **Neville**, [...]

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said **Jinny** [...]

‘I hear something stamping,’ said **Louis**, [...]

(TW 5)

“ ‘Now to sum up, said Bernard. Now to explain *to you* the meaning of my life [...] ” (**TW** 185 ; emphasis mine)

“Virginia Woolf's decision to break this prevailing convention of the book, and others as well, subtly altered the reader's relation to what is narrated [...], and therefore to the work as a whole.” (Graham 200-201)

“ ‘We are all phrases in Bernard's story [...]’ said Neville.” (**TW** 51)



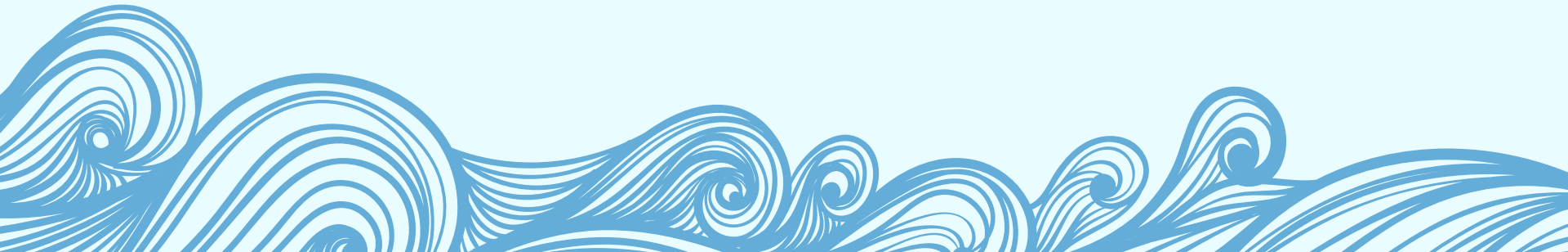
Bernard as “allegorical respondent” (*répondant allégorique*)

“The projective faculty of the writer **who delegates his/her powers in the universe of fiction to a representation of himself/herself.**”

(Zanetta 4 ; translation mine)

“is not an author *in* fiction, but an emissary, **a delegation**, an embassy that the author constitutes and **endows with a power of representation** in fiction [...]. [T]his entity will have to [...] correspond to her/him in a mirror, **in a place where – paradoxically – *s/he is not.*”**

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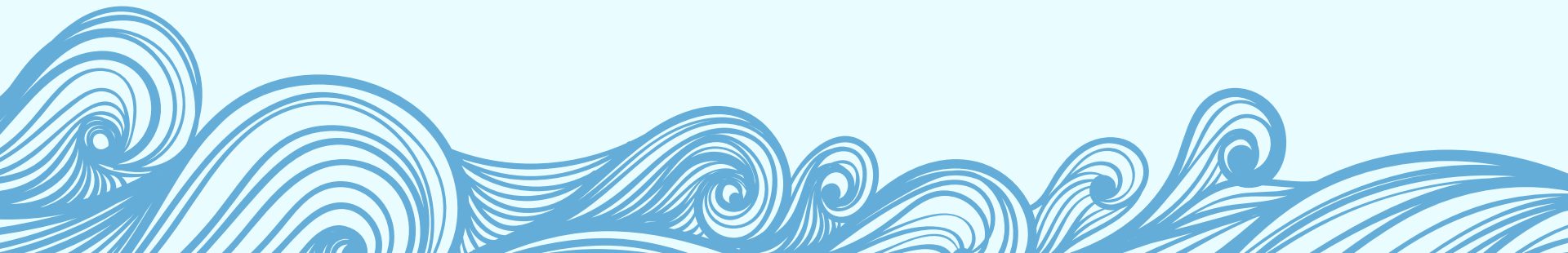
“For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman.”

(TW 216)



Bernard, the Lady Writing, and Virginia Woolf

Bernard → Lady writing



Bernard, the Lady Writing, and Virginia Woolf

Bernard → Lady writing

Bernard ← Lady writing

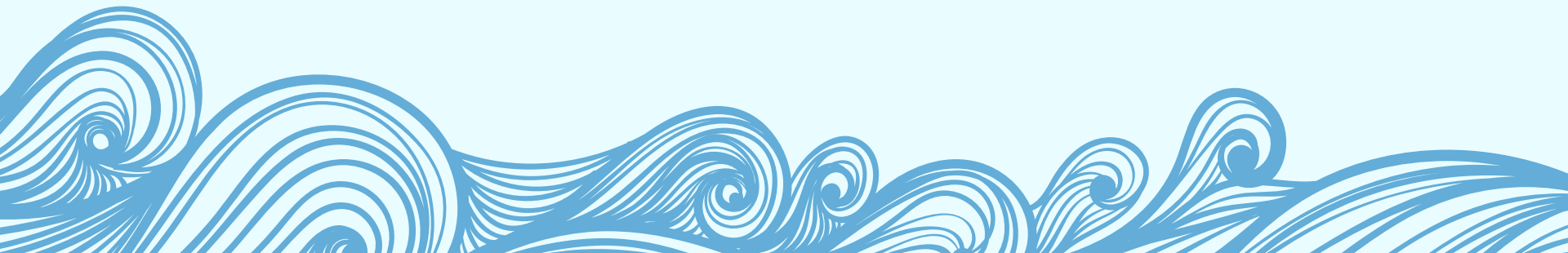


Bernard, the Lady Writing, and Virginia Woolf

Bernard → Lady writing

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Bernard ⇌ Lady writing



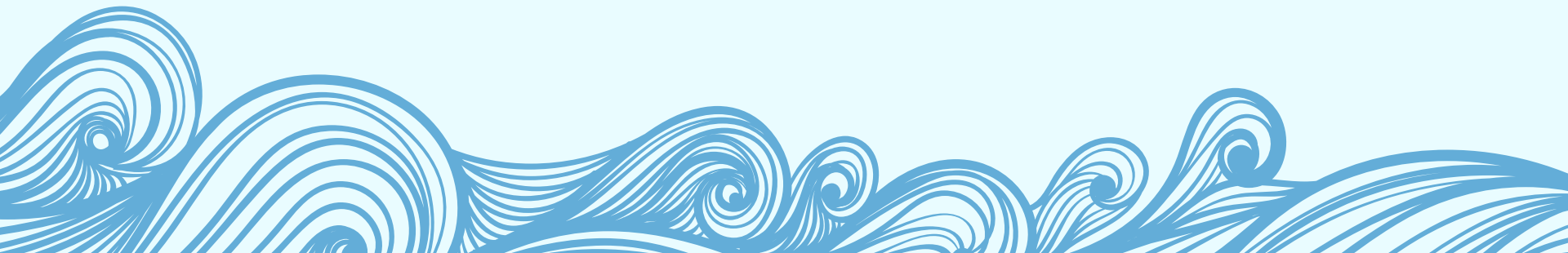
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“Let me then create you. (You have done as much for me.)” (*TW* 63)



Bernard, the Lady Writing, and Virginia Woolf

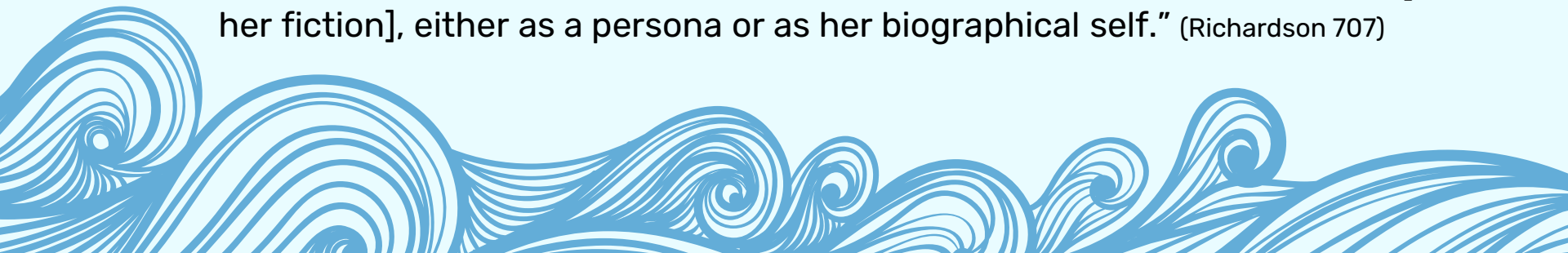
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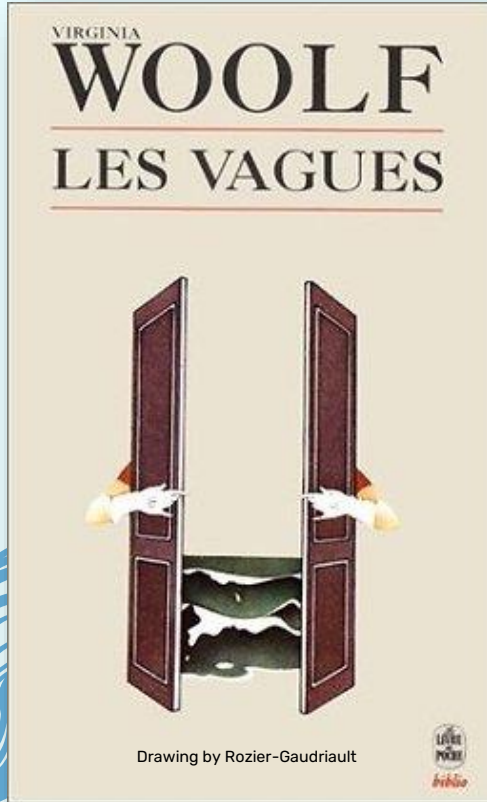
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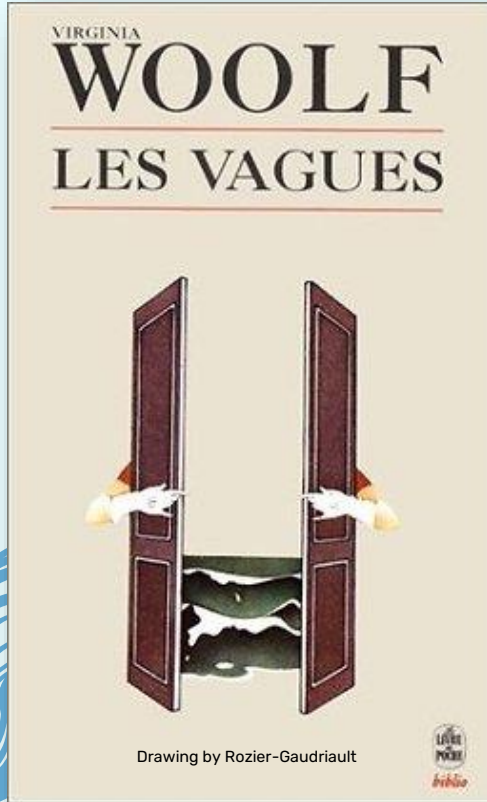
“Bernard catching sight of the woman writing may be, simply, a reversal of the observer and the observed, so that Woolf can reintroduce herself [in her fiction], either as a persona or as her biographical self.” (Richardson 707)



The Lady Writing, Virginia Woolf, and *The Waves*

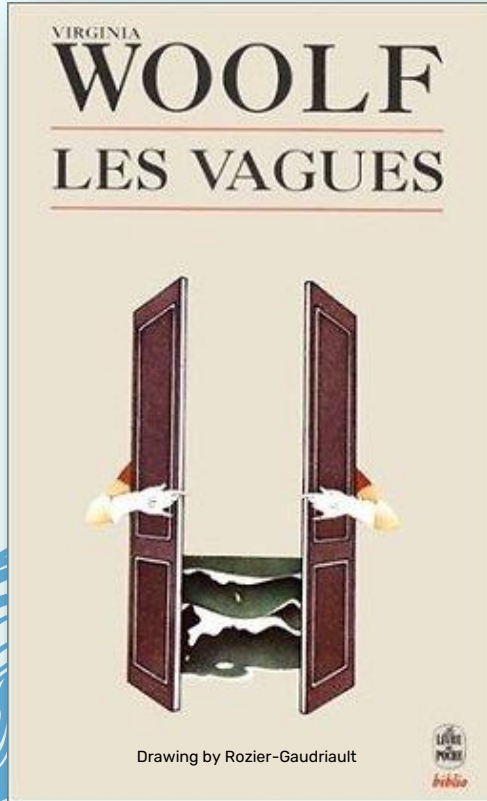


The Lady Writing, Virginia Woolf, and *The Waves*



“Now to explain to you the meaning of my life [...] I must tell you a story [...].’ ” (**TW** 185)

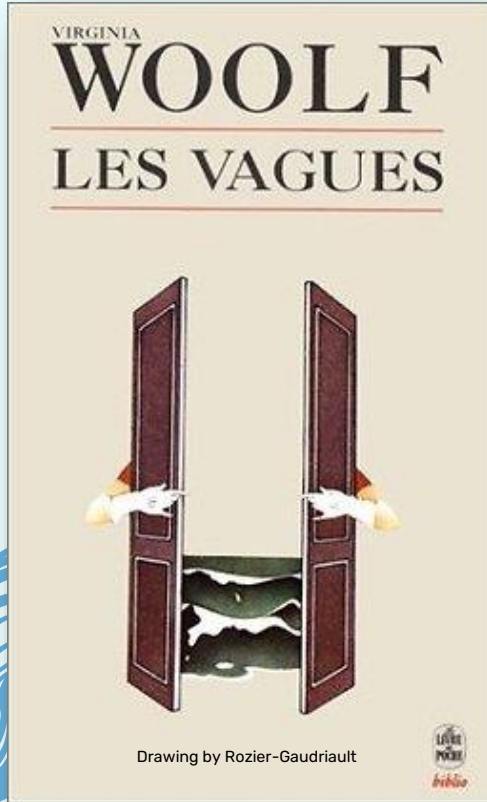
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Lyrical subject in prose // Narrauthor

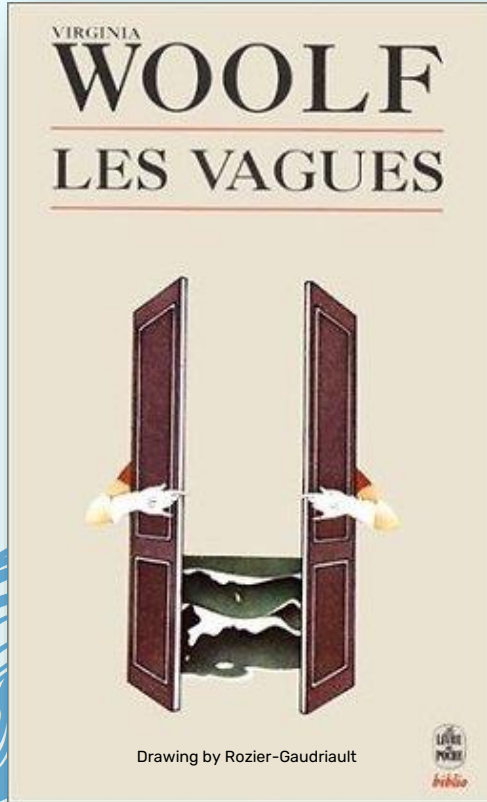
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“‘Who am I?’ I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together.” (*TW* 222)

The Lady Writing, Virginia Woolf, and *The Waves*



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“She opens the window & [lets] the moth com[e] in.” (**DVW**; “Tuesday 28 May, 1929”)



Thank you for your attention.



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