

Takwa Hedhli

Omayma Jabri



Time in Mrs. Dalloway



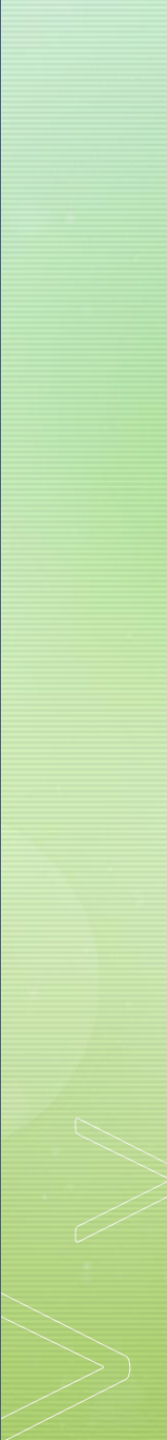
Outlines

- ☐ *Introduction*
- ☐ *The importance of time*
- ☐ *Variance in time*
- ☐ *Gendered concept of time*
- ☐ *Conclusion*



Introduction

Time plays a vital role in the Stream-of Consciousness novels. The Stream-of Consciousness novelists never think that the morning and the evening are one day; evening or morning or any part of either might represent eternity or less than a single pulse-beat. They deviate from the convention of chronological continuity. They broke up time into atomic bits and scattered them as they liked, whereas the Victorian novelists ‘clung on to the calendar and clock.’ The exponents of this new technique believe that all reality lies in consciousness and that our consciousness does not proceed logically and coherently



The importance of time

- *Time and memory are handled in three opposing ways by Woolf. In Mrs Dalloway, past and present have different effects upon the novel's protagonists, each of whom are diametrically opposed with regard to how they handle personal memories. Clarissa Dalloway embraces the past, Peter Walsh wallows within it, and traumatised Septimus Smith tries his utmost to repel it. Clarissa's memories live on for her, reinforcing Peter's idea, that 'women live much more in the past than we [males] do'. [4]*

Variance in time

- *A variance is presented between clock time and lived time. Mrs Dalloway takes place in less than a twenty-four hour period, beginning early in the morning and ending during the long-awaited party. This adds to the sense of immediacy which modernity held within its grip, demonstrating the feeling that everything was happening right at the present moment. This is a concept which can only interestingly be moderated with time itself. The idea of time as a regulator harks back to Einstein's theories of time and relativity, and Bergson's concepts of temps and durée. In consequence, memory can be said to regulate time. With regard to both Clarissa and Septimus, it can be said that the two exist spatially – and, to an extent, temporally – in Woolf's depiction of London, but that much of their living – particularly in the case of Septimus – occurs in 'lived' time, specifically in terms of their own depictions of nostalgia.*

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Time

Time imparts order to the fluid thoughts, memories, and encounters that make up Mrs. Dalloway. Big Ben, a symbol of England and its might, sounds out the hour relentlessly, ensuring that the passage of time, and the awareness of eventual death, is always palpable. Clarissa, Septimus, Peter, and other characters are in the grip of time, and as they age they evaluate how they have spent their lives. Clarissa, in particular, senses the passage of time, and the appearance of Sally and Peter, friends from the past, emphasizes how much time has gone by since Clarissa was young. Once the hour chimes, however, the sound disappears—its “leaden circles dissolved in the air.” This expression recurs many times throughout the novel, indicating how ephemeral time is, despite the pomp of Big Ben and despite people’s wary obsession with it. “It is time,” Rezia says to Septimus as they sit in the park waiting for the doctor’s appointment on Harley Street. The ancient woman at the Regent’s Park Tube station suggests that the human condition knows no boundaries of time, since she continues to sing the same song for what seems like eternity. She understands that life is circular, not merely linear, which is the only sort of time that Big Ben tracks. Time is so important to the themes, structure, and characters of this novel that Woolf almost named her book The Hours.

Gendered concept of time

- *Clarissa echoes Bergson's concept of durée and through her, Woolf presents a criticism on the inherited class privilege and upper-class idealism which Clarissa so distinctly embodies. Thacker reiterates this: 'Clarissa's delight in urban "life" is shown to be restricted to the ability of her class to enjoy such freedom'.[5] Peter remembers past instances which are still of the utmost importance to him. He continuously asserts what could have been, as opposed to what is or what was. Through Richard Dalloway, Woolf also presents the notion of an escape from the present and the desire to live in the past in order to regain one's youth and opportunities. Episodic interpretations of Septimus's war-scarred past are always at the forefront of his consciousness. One gets a sense that time is happening to him, and that he is at its mercy. Sir William Bradshaw controls the masculine influence of time, and clearly has domination over his wife's time as well as his own.*

Else where in the novel, Clarissa's past is often presented alongside her daughter Elizabeth's. Here, Woolf reinforces the regimes of clock time which each of her characters are ruled by. One can never escape that: for Woolf, memory and the past are inherently linked with the present, thus creating the importance of the 'moment' in her work.

This leads into gendered concepts of time which can be found throughout the novel.[6] In terms of feminine approaches, Clarissa struggles to fill her time. She flounders within a routine which is structured on this particular day only due to her party preparation. Lucrezia Warren Smith, on the other hand, has a variety of tasks to complete which alter with every hour. The disparity presented between Lucrezia and Clarissa is vast. A contrast is also given between the working woman and the lady of leisure. Some of Woolf's female characters are almost overwhelmed by time, especially with regard to those who work in private houses; Clarissa's maid Lucy is a prime example

We take for granted the fact that Clarissa's memories are entirely true, sometimes seeming, as they do, to be far more real than elements of her whirlwind present-day trip around London. Woolf effectively uses clock time as a tool with which to structure the novel.

Big Ben is ever-present in the novel, watching over London almost like a god; he appears as a character proper in the novel and is given human characteristics: 'Still the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him'.[7] Big Ben orders and locates experience within the city, helping to define the immediate present: the 'now'. With this simplistic placing of a London icon, time as a structural principle is close to the surface of Mrs Dalloway: 'The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour' as a marker of time is prevalent.[8] Time is personified throughout Mrs Dalloway: 'an immortal ode to Time'.[9] It is also rather cleverly given physical characteristics of movement: 'Time flaps on the mast'.[10] Structured time as a concept runs alongside lived time, and even the word time itself is mulled upon: 'The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him'.[11]

Conclusion

- *Time, in the novel, is both act and actor; character and concept. The flux of time, in all of its guises, gives a real sense of agency to the novel, allowing everything to be measured against it. The notion of the infinite nature of time is often just as important for Woolf as the moment itself. This focus upon time in Mrs Dalloway reflects Woolf's own obsession with it. Hermione Lee writes: 'Her compulsive and compulsory timetables fulfilled her need for order, and stopped her thinking about death'*

References

- <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/mrs-dalloway/themes/time>
<https://prizedwriting.ucdavis.edu/significance-time-mrs-dalloway#:~:text=Critic%20Bernard%20Blackstone%20wrote%20that,but%20sporadic%3B%20eternal%20but%20vanishing.>