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THE CONCEPTION OF TIME IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S WORKS

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Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá pojetím času v dílech Virginie Woolfové. Toto téma je popsáno a rozebráno převážně v románech *Paní Dallowayová* a *K majáku*, avšak část práce je věnována také povídce *Skvrna na zdi* a eseji *Pan Bennett a paní Brownová*. Cílem práce je popsat, jak Virginie Woolfová pracuje s časem, poukázat na to, že své pojetí času uplatňuje ve většině svých děl a že je značně ovlivněno vědeckým, uměleckým a filosofickým kontextem přelomu 19. a 20. století. Práce je napsána v anglickém jazyce.

Annotation

This bachelor thesis is focused on the conception of time in Virginia Woolf's works. This phenomenon is mainly described and analysed in the novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, but the minor part of the thesis is devoted to the short story "The Mark on the Wall" and the essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." The aim of the thesis is to depict the way Woolf works with time, to suggest that her time conception may be applied to the majority of her works, and that it is closely related to the scientific, artistic and philosophical context of the turn of the 20th century.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on the conception of time in Virginia Woolf's works, namely on the short story "The Mark on the Wall," the essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and the novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The thesis is thus divided into four main chapters that handle the theme of time in these works. The chapters are ordered chronologically according to the date of publication of the given work, because the aim is to describe the way Woolf treats the phenomenon of time, and to point out that her conception of time is prefigured in her early works, and then evolves in her later major works, for example in the novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *The Waves*. The chapters provide theoretical background on Woolf's writing style, in which the phenomenon of time is reflected, and close reading of passages from the chosen works where the phenomenon of time is traced and analysed.

The theme of time is quite universal and common, but some authors can make this topic prevalent and striking in their works, which is worth analysing. Virginia Woolf is one of these authors whose conception of time is quite unique and unquestionably related to the scientific and artistic context of the turn of the 20th century. The author was well aware of the theories of the American psychologist William James, French philosopher Henri Bergson and even of physical, mathematical and philosophical theories of Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell. Woolf's way of writing is not influenced only by the late 19th century and early 20th century science but also by the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century, for example impressionist and post-impressionist paintings. She was much pleased with the exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" (Harris 45) organised by her friend and art critic Roger Fry in 1910, which inevitably left some marks on her way of writing as the reader of her works may notice.

In general, Woolf's treatment of time is highly subjective and from the reading of her works the reader gets the impression that the author was very anxious of the fast passage of time. We may only guess whether this anxiety is related to her mental illness that allowed her to live fully just a few hours a day. From that we may conclude that time was probably something very precious for her and consequently, it became an important theme of her works. The latter are thus pervaded by intense moments of perception of the present, but there is always some past experience present in these moments, which coincides with the idea of Bergson's *durée* [duration]: "distinct states

of external world give rise to states of consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past into the present by this very process of connexion” (Bergson, *Time* 121). This subjective conscious perception of time during which the past is linked to the present is thus in contrast with chronologically ordered external reality. Bergson’s concept is similar to William James’s idea of stream of consciousness, or train of thought, which is based on the sequence of percepts related to the present but some past percept always remains in the final perceived image. Bergson’s ideas on the consciousness and James’s stream of consciousness are analysed mainly in the first chapter dedicated to the 1917 short story “The Mark on the Wall.” This chapter also suggests that the short story may be conceived as the incessant moment of being which is provoked by deep plunges into the main character’s consciousness. The centring and unifying element, the snail, is also analysed in this chapter, because these centring elements are important also in Woolf’s novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The elements unify the characters, but they also play the role of an unchanging landmark in Woolf’s narrative. They very often enable the author to apply circular narration to her works.

The second chapter is dedicated to the 1923 essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” where the reader learns about Woolf’s way of writing that consists in focusing on her characters’ inner life. As Woolf explores human consciousness, it enables her to link multiple temporal planes together, because human consciousness does not perceive images in chronological order as suggested by Bergson. Woolf argues in the essay that the author has to reject long descriptions of the external reality in order to represent his characters’ internal reality authentically, which consequently enables him to present several temporal dimensions at once. This chapter also contrasts Woolf’s highly subjective narratives with her impersonal passages that are usually characterised by a single temporal plane unless some character enters these passages.

The third chapter of the thesis deals with the 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*. It analyses the stream of consciousness writing method on the basis of William James’s theory. In fact, the novel is composed of various characters’ trains of thoughts. The chapter also focuses on the role of Big Ben which nearly creates one of the novel’s characters, and serves as a reminder that the time runs in the same manner for everyone. However, the sameness of clock time is contrasted with the subjective perception of time manifested mainly in the characters of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. This chapter also analyses how the two characters relate to Paul Ricoeur’s idea

of monumental time that is connected with the institutions and authorities of external world, and how ambiguous the idea of time may be. The chapter also explains how Woolf introduces and presents her characters to the reader. She does not say everything at once about her characters, but she applies the so-called tunnelling process that enables her to tell the story of her characters by “instalments,” and to recollect their past and present experiences which at the end of the novel create the whole image, the whole mosaic of the characters’ lives. In fact, this aspect of Woolf’s writing is quite similar to the conception and creation of impressionist paintings that are based on visual perception of separate brush strokes and details composing a more complex image. The same principle of fragmentation is evident in Woolf’s writing style.

The fourth chapter analyses the 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*. This novel is regarded as autobiographical to a great extent. It tells the story of the Ramsays who spend their vacation in their summer house by the sea, which is conceived as the parallel with the Stephens’ sojourns in their summer house in Cornwall. In this way Woolf tries to capture the past, analyse it and reconcile with it. The novel thus indirectly tackles Woolf’s complicated relationship with her parents and tries to settle them in her mind (Harris 91-93). The phenomenon of time is reflected mainly in the novel’s structure which is divided into three parts. The first part represents the past that is pursued by several characters in the final part set in the present. The importance of the impersonal passage “Time Passes” is analysed in the chapter focusing on the essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown.” The unifier of time and of the characters’ common setting is represented by the lighthouse in this novel. The lighthouse is also the steady element that does not decay with time, contrary to human lives. The latter is often projected or compared to natural phenomena such as waves, which coincides with Shakespeare’s naturally measured time appearing in his sonnets, for example. The sound of breaking waves has double-sided impact on the perceiver as also analysed while speaking about Big Ben and his functions. The reminder of life’s cycle and passage of time may be even hurtful for some characters. The most important motif in *To the Lighthouse* is the pursuit and recreation of the past that consist in the accomplishment of the voyage to the lighthouse and in the completion of Lily Briscoe’s painting. Special focus in this chapter is put on the character of Mrs Ramsay, her relative nature to all the other characters and her ability to be permanently fixed in other characters’ memory. The last phenomenon highlighted in the chapter is the correspondence between a period of time and spatial dimension, for example distance or height.

1. “The Mark on the Wall” as an Incessant Moment of Being and Stream of Consciousness at Once

Woolf's short story “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) is her first published piece of this genre. The short story introduces Woolf's poetic vision and serves as a harbinger of her later highly imaginative novels. Although the work itself is really rather short, only a few pages, it is significant for its complexity, both of the content and of its theoretical and philosophical basis of Woolf's writing style. Despite the fact that the work is admirable in several aspects - its narrative's colourfulness, for instance, as the short story as a whole impacts the reader in a similar way as an impressionist painting; or the wide scale of themes and images it presents (notably the theme of the inescapable passage of time) -, the chapter focuses exclusively on the interplay between its narrative style and conception of time. The analysis is based mainly on the concept of the stream of consciousness as presented by William James in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and on Woolf's moments of being brilliantly described by Teresa Prudente in her book *A Special Piece of Eternity: Virginia Woolf and the Experience of Time* (2009). Let us now proceed to the analysis.

1.1 The Cyclical Structure

Even though the beginning of the story (the introduction) is formally narrated in the past (an ordinary day of January of that year), the narrator's (probably a young woman, maybe Woolf herself, but there is no information about the character provided in the text) perspective then shifts to the immediate present, covering the real time of an hour at most. However, the temporal setting changes multiple times during the process of narration and the temporal dimension is extended to the past and the future as hinted by the alteration of the present simple tense with the past simple tense, present perfect tense and the future simple tense.

Let us imagine the scene of the short story as if it were staged in the theatre. The basic starting point is the present moment in which a young woman is sitting in her living room and watching some dark rounded stain on the room's wall, and she is imagining what the stain could be. This moment represents a separate unit of time which is observed by the audience, or the reader, as the present. The mark on the wall functions as a stimulus of the narrator's consciousness, and then provokes the plunge into the depths of his consciousness. By this means we escape from the present into

different temporal dimensions – the past, the future or some indefinable temporal setting. In fact, the mark on the wall, a snail as we learn later, is the impulse which makes the narrator plunge into those different temporal dimensions, but it is also the “anchor” which guarantees his return into the present moment. The snail is the centre of the short story, the element which creates its “unity and order, and enables the author to literary picture the chaotic stream of consciousness [translation from Czech to English is mine]” (Hilský 161).

The narrative flow of the short story depends on the narrator’s consciousness that moves from the eye’s fixation on the snail to the already mentioned different temporal dimensions. Thus, the narrative is cyclical. The reader gets from the snail on a kind of circular orbit where he is diverted from the present moment, and is dragged into new, unexplored temporal spheres. Throughout reading the short story, the reader involuntarily undergoes the imaginary cycle seven times in total, starting from the snail, and arriving at it again. To compare this conception with other Woolf’s works, the snail (the mark on the wall) plays a similar role as Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway* and the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*. It represents the chronological (historical) time, reminds the novels’ characters of the present moment, the passage of time, and stimulates their consciousness to activity, but also brings order to it.

1.2 The Manifestations of Consciousness

So far, we have just outlined how the short story is structured, we have underlined the role of consciousness in the short story, but we have not explained yet on which principle consciousness works in Woolf’s prose. As it will be analysed in the next chapter dealing with Woolf’s essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, consciousness and characters’ mental states are one of the main ideas the modern fiction focused on: “What now holds the centre of attention is the incompleteness of personality, the diversity of the levels of the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious, the stirring of unformulated desires, the inchoative and evanescent character of feelings” (Ricoeur 10). As Henri Bergson points out in the Chapter II of his philosophical essay *Time and Free Will*, people always try to put events into chronological order, into succession, they want to set clear distinction between the past and the present moment. We incline to understand the world through the logic of causes and consequences. The linear succession of time is very superficial and straightforward, it is just simplification and ordering of external reality. Our understanding of time consists in setting a point in

space and regarding it as the past, for example. Woolf criticizes this approach in the short story “The Mark on the Wall” through the irony related to Whitaker’s Almanack that represents right the linear reality event by event:

This train of thought, she perceives [nature], is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality, for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker’s table of Precedency? The Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; the Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York. Everybody follows somebody, such is the philosophy of Whitaker; and the great thing is to know who follow whom (Woolf, *Monday* 52-53).

It is often forgotten that every present moment bears some traces of the past, and no clear distinction exists between the two. Human consciousness, according to Bergson, works on a slightly different principle. It tends to abandon the linear idea of time, and instead of linear exposition of events and impulses it exposes them in a manner that they permeate one another, as if one coincided with the other, and cooperated with the other. These different ideas or external impulses are posed nearly side by side, then “melted” one to another, and they create a completely new sensation which affects the subject. Such newly-created complex sensations are no longer easily described and set on the time axis because of their a-linear, nearly atemporal character, by which they correspond to Bergson’s “durée” (duration): “distinct states of external world give rise to states of consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past into the present by this very process of connexion” (Bergson, *Time* 121). Exactly this process is undergone by Woolf’s character while experiencing “moments of being”. In fact, as it has already been mentioned, the short story “The Mark on the Wall” could be wholly interpreted as one long, sometimes briefly interrupted, moment of being.” This claim is built upon the phenomenon discussed above, the mixture of the temporal order and the achievement of different, unknown temporal dimension. Let us expand the idea.

1.21 The Moment of Being and Ecstasy in “The Mark on the Wall”

In the short story “The Mark on the Wall” the reader is exposed to many different ideas at once. He is stirred to a certain “vortex” which leads him from reality, from the present moment, and captures him in the depth of the narrator’s consciousness. The process is called the moment of being. As already foreshadowed, this mechanism is

sometimes interrupted by the narrator's sudden reminder of the mark on the wall, which serves as an anchor which binds him with reality: "Indeed, now that I fixed my eyes upon it [the mark of the wall], I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Arch bishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is something definite, here is something real" (Woolf, *Selected* 53).

Let us explain what in fact the moment of being is. On one hand, the moment of being is a momentary exit from the chronological time, but on the other hand, it is a momentary entrance to the non-linear temporal dimension. The subject who experiences the moment of being is by some impulse, a stimulus or a shock of either external or internal reality dragged into his own mind, into his consciousness, where, as we have already said, events and ideas are not governed by the linear succession. In this purely internal process, the subject perceives many experiences and ideas from the past or the present at once, as Bergson described, they "melt" one to another, and create "a single meaningful image, which incorporates both the subject's present moment and her [sic] past" (Prudente 13). Prudente also claims that the moment of being often results in an ecstatic state of the subject's consciousness, which makes the moment of being even more significant considering its impact on the subject. After this complex and impressive experience, the subject's returns to the reality, to the chronological, linear time, but with a slightly changed perception of reality, because he experiences a "revelation": "The revelation experienced in the moment of being appears thus to stimulate in the subject an insight able to unveil the complexity of his perception and to make him acknowledge how the mind moves on simultaneously, contradictory and temporally different levels" (47). Moreover, Prudente states that the moments of being leave such a profound and strong impression on the subject that the complex image may be regarded as eternal. By the means of the simultaneous experience of multiple images of subject's life, those images gain the eternal dimension. They are unforgettable.

To apply this principle on the short story "The Mark on the Wall," we can consider the mark on the wall, the snail as the stimulus which starts off the whole short story. The mark may be considered as having nearly a hypnotising effect, which is sometimes the cause of the moment of being, in the novel *To the Lighthouse*; it is, for example, the regular rhythm of waves' beats. After the introduction of the mark on the wall, the narrator constantly showers the reader with a plenty of miscellaneous ideas, images or memories. Those ideas are expressed without evident logic and chronological

order. Thus, let us regard the whole short story as a single intensive moment of being. Throughout the story, the moment of being is several times suspended by the image of the snail, but on the other hand, it is also intensified nearly to the ecstatic state:

Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization—let me just count over a few of the things lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle board, the hand organ—all gone, and jewels, too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips. What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure! The wonder is that I've any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse.
(Woolf, *Monday* 48)

Ecstatic moments and the climax of the moment of being are characterised by the extreme rapidity of the narrative flow in comparison with the other parts of the short story. The swift pace is formally expressed by the sequence of shorter sentences, expressions, simple ideas or images following each other, often divided by hyphens. These accelerated passages of the narrative appear several times throughout the story; they reliably mark the individual moments of beings of which the short story is consisted. After such culminations in the narrative, the flow of the short story decelerates, but it means for the reader the anticipation of another moment of being. Let us suggest that by the acceleration or deceleration of the narrative, Woolf also modifies the reader's temporal perception, because she makes him believe that time does not pass regularly, with the constant pace, but its passage is governed by the subject's consciousness and his will.

1.22 The Stream of Consciousness as the Extension of the Moment of Being

Understandingly, there is no just one way of conceiving the narration of “The Mark on the Wall.” Woolf is known for the utilisation of the stream of consciousness narrative technique which was first described by William James in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). He treats consciousness similarly as Bergson whose ideas on the latter have been discussed above. He also regards consciousness as purely subjective matter which works on a different principle than the external world. By putting emphasis on the organic changeable unity of our consciousness as a whole, he prefigures Bergson’s “durée”:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life* [sic]. (Chapter 9)

The stream of consciousness narrative technique is the focus of the chapter on the conception of time in the novel *Mrs Dalloway* where the technique dominates, but here, we just outline how the stream of consciousness collaborates with moments of being in the short story “The Mark on the Wall.”

The stream of consciousness consists in outpouring of a character’s mind that deluges the reader with succession of multiple ideas, images or sensations. It is also the technique of non-linear narration, because as we have several times underlined, our consciousness does not correspond to the linearity, but rather juxtaposes ideas which blend one to another and produce a completely new image or idea. That is also the basis of the stream of consciousness narrative technique, and as we may notice, it is the same process which is employed while experiencing the moment of being, but without the ecstatic emotion and final revelation. It similarly strings together different temporal experiences as it weds the past with the present.

Our claim is that the moment of being is just the culmination of the stream of consciousness technique. Unless the writer uses the stream of consciousness technique, it would be nearly impossible for her to provide such an insight to a character’s mind during the moment of being, because the stream of consciousness applied in Woolf’s works turns the attention to a character’s consciousness, and this serves as a preparation for the forthcoming moment of being. Therefore, these two narrative techniques are

interconnected and one prefigures the other. Comparing the length of the short story “The Mark on the Wall” with the length of Woolf’s novels, naturally, the moments of being are more frequent in the shorter fiction, because the alteration of the stream of consciousness with the moment of being techniques must be adjusted to the length of the work, thus, the narrative seems more condense and rich in moments of being. Therefore, even the temporal aspect of the work seems to be more fruitful.

Since both techniques permit the reader to renounce the temporal narrative linearity in the short story “The Mark on the Wall,” we can conceive them as the exemplary narrative means which enables Woolf to perform the temporal play in her fiction.

2. Woolf's Literary Theory in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" in Connection to her Temporal Conception

2.1 The Georgians Invent New Tools to Create and Treat Characters

Woolf's essay "Character in Fiction", which was separately reprinted in 1924 as the essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (Baldick 6), is the basic text for the understanding of the author's literary conception, narrative style and methods. In relation to the latter, the text inconspicuously reveals even the idea of Woolf's treatment of time. In the essay, Woolf outlines her distinction between "the Edwardians" and "the Georgians" as a turnabout from objectivity and "external realism" (Baldick 190) towards subjectivity and the character itself, which is professed by the interest in human mind and consciousness. Consequently, as it has already been explained, the focus on human consciousness enables the writer to explore new narrative means which also include new methods of the expression of time.

On the example of the imaginary character Mrs Brown, Woolf objects to the narrative art of the novelists writing at the turn of the 20th century. They are called Edwardians according to the then monarch on the British throne – Edward VII. She names several representatives of this literary "group" - H. G. Wells, J. Galsworthy, but she particularly focuses on Arnold Bennett to whom (of course, to the reader as well) she seems to address her discourse on new tendencies in literature of the early 20th century.

In the essay, Woolf constantly argues against Bennett's claim that "the foundation of good fiction is character creating and nothing else" (Woolf, *Selected* 37). She agrees that characters are the basis of good fiction, but she calls for a new approach to the creation of characters and to the treatment of characters themselves. Woolf provides an example of Bennett's 1911 novel *Hilda Leesways* on which she demonstrates the means used by the author to introduce the character of Hilda for the first time. Bennett disregards Hilda, and he pays attention to the description of minute details concerning her house and its surroundings. He builds his character upon external details which should arouse in the reader the impression of verisimilitude. Thus, Bennett relies on the method which consists in the assumption that the more details from characters' lives and setting the author provides, the more authentic characters seem to the reader. Therefore, he attempts to create objective reality easily acceptable and well-arranged for the reader. However, a problem rises, as he emphasizes characters

to be the core of good fiction. As he works hard on their vivid creation, he totally loses himself in externality, which leads him to lose his characters that are no longer “real” and close to the reader as Woolf points out: “And now – where is Hilda? Alas” (46).

Woolf rejects this overflow of external details, and prefers her characters to be the centre of her fiction from its very beginning: “I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite. I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character. . .” (42). Then, she appropriates the tool of the “insight” to her characters’ minds and personalities (46). Therefore, her intention is to create more subjective and personal fiction which would seem to be less artificial. Woolf appeals to the writers and readers of that time to “rescue” Mrs Brown, not to desert her and all the other fictional characters.

2.2 The Character, Subjectivity and its Relation to Time

As it has already been drafted, to place characters to the centre of a work of fiction enables the writer to experiment, to establish, and to use new narrative means as for example the “stream of consciousness” or “internal monologue” methods. All these new or rediscovered narrative tools are highly subjective and provide an insight into the character’s mind where various mental processes take place. These processes are the wheel to express Woolf’s characters that are usually gifted to perceive images, and to feel subsequent sensation very intensively. Right these subtle mental acts allow the writer to explore human consciousness, and to operate with such subjective elements as the conception and perception of time. In Woolf’s works, everything is actually related to some character, related to the character’s body as well as to the character’s mind. It is as if the character himself created the reality, which is exactly the principle described in Henri Bergson’s work *Matter and Memory*:

Here is a system of images which I term my perception of the universe, and which may be entirely altered by a very slight change in a certain privileged image, - *my body* [sic]. This image occupies the centre; by it all the others are conditioned; at each of its movements everything changes, as though by a turn of kaleidoscope. (12)

It is important to specify what Bergson means by the “body.” As we may guess from the title of his work, he tries to describe and analyse the relation between the body and the mind, and to unite the materialism and idealism: “. . . it is that the body, always turned towards action, has for its essential function to limit, with a view of action, the

life of the spirit” (233). It seems that for him the body (the matter) and the mind (memory) cooperate with each other and one cannot work properly with the other. His treatment of sensual perception is in accordance with Woolf’s characters’ depicted feelings while they experience a sensation or perceive an image. Bergson says that the immediate data perception is never scraped off past memories and experiences (24). Those past experiences link the past with the present data perceived by a body, thus, the final perceived image is a joint product of the cooperation between the body (matter) and mind (memory). Exactly this unity of the past and the present gives Woolf’s character a chance to “travel in time” and to Woolf herself a tool to make her fiction more temporally interesting and less conventional.

Let us demonstrate this phenomenon on the very beginning of the first chapter of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* which is quite well known for Clarissa’s act of purchasing flowers:

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. (3)

The first sentence of the novel already introduces the character, Clarissa Dalloway herself. In the second and the third sentence, the reader already gets the idea that there is some special occasion happening in Clarissa’s house on that day. In the fourth and the three following sentences, the reader is provided with the “plunge” into Clarissa’s mind. This is also the place in the text, where the transition between the present and the past is set. We can also apply Bergson’s dual nature of perception on this example. External impulse, the fresh air which in that moment affects Clarissa’s body, represents the pure present perception which is immediately enriched by recollections of the past produced by memory – memories of her stay at Bourton. However, the transition between the past and the present is so subtle and indistinct that the reader is as if dragged into the past without being conscious of it. This is Woolf’s tool frequently used in her prose; she guides readers very naturally through different temporal planes, and leaves them in astonishment over the imaginary time travel they undertake. The next paragraph presents a mere recollection of the past, namely

Clarissa's stay at Bourton where she probably experienced a romance with Peter Walsh (3). This rumination about the past is suspended by the reminder of the present, namely Peter Walsh's current stay in India: "He [Peter Walsh] would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes. . . . She [Clarissa] stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtall's van to pass" (3). The last quoted sentence suddenly interrupts Clarissa's train of thoughts, and quite violently places the reader to the pure present abandoned in the previous paragraph.

While reading Woolf's works, the reader realizes very rapidly that the author's fiction consists mostly of these "fragments" of perception where the present and the past are intermingled. The reader has to renounce his want of logical chronological order of actions, and has to yield to the temporal play offered by the writer.

However, the phenomenon described above appears in Woolf's fiction only in relation to some of her characters, because the phenomenon is highly subjective and cannot be applied without any reference to a human psyche.

2.3 Impersonal Passages in Woolf's Works

To extend the idea from the previous section, it is worthwhile to contrast Woolf's intensive moments of perception, where the past and the present merges, with the passages of the author's works which are highly objective and impersonal on purpose. To be precise, we are now concerned with the "natural interludes" in the novel *The Waves* and with the passage "Time Passes" in the novel *To the Lighthouse*, but mere descriptive passages may be found even in her other novels. These passages are significant with their neutrality regarding the characters. The objectivity of the passages consists in the lists of minute external details, descriptions of objects and places, but the narration is not related to any character, it is not influenced by any human psyche or body. Thus, the temporal nature of these passages is limited just to one temporal plane which usually only reflects the state of the elements described.

In *The Waves* no person appears in the "interludes." It is only a lyric description of the movement of the sun in the sky and the sea waves which measure time of the novel limited to a single day. Even though the narration of these passages is detailed, very intensive and artistic, its quality is different than the one of the moments of perception related to some character. The absence of a character strikes us in the passages, because they are so unusual and unexpected in Woolf's novels. By their

objective and impersonal character, they resemble, to some extent, to Arnold Bennett “external realism” to which Woolf objects. Let us demonstrate the absence of a character on a short passage from the interlude which could be compared with Bennett’s descriptions:

The sun fell in sharp wedges inside the room. Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice. Suddenly tumblers revealed themselves upheld by streaks of light. Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit. (Woolf, *Waves* 61)

To be precise while comparing the two passages, let us quote also a short passage from Bennett’s novel *Hilda Leesways*, the same as proposed in Woolf’s essay:

It was one of the middle houses of a detached terrace of four houses built by her grandfather Leesways, the teapot manufacturer; it was the chief of the four, obviously the habitation of the proprietor of the terrace. One of the corner houses comprised a grocer’s shop, and this house had been robbed of its just proportion of garden so that the seigneurial garden plot might be triflingly larger than the other. (Woolf, *Selected* 47)

As we may notice, both passages have something to do with characters, because they are concerned with houses in which characters live, but there is no character directly appearing in them. Woolf’s description tends to be more lyrical and natural; on the other hand, that of Bennett’s strikes us as more material and thorough. However, there is a major difference between the meaning and intent of these descriptions in the whole of the novel. Bennett employs the latter quite sparingly in his prose, as it had been already suggested; he oversupplies the reader with such minute details in order to persuade him about the authenticity of the character. Thus, these descriptive passages do not surprise the reader of Bennett’s novels, moreover, he expects and demands them, and he is quite used to the objective passages where the character is absent. On the contrary, the reader of Woolf’s novels is rather unacquainted with such passages, because he is used that the most of Woolf’s narrative is provided from the viewpoint of some character or at least, it is somehow subjectively related to a character. Let us suggest that these neutral passages in Woolf’s works are applied with the intent to contrast the two worlds of the “external” and “internal” reality. The former is dominated by a chronological temporal order of events, one temporal plane and plain perspective,

while the latter is enriched with subtle subjective descriptions, characters' various mental states and different temporal planes. Thus, as we could notice, the passages describing external reality, either those of Woolf's or Bennett's, are reduced to a mere account of details concerning the setting. That disables the writer to experiment with temporal conception as the absence of characters (the absence of human consciousness and subjectivity) is employed in the novel.

The section "Time Passes" from the novel *To the Lighthouse* is not a pure description of external details, but there are two narrative approaches combined. First, the reader is acquainted with the desolate state in which the Ramsays' summer house is found after their ten-year absence:

So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round, those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them but only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of tables, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked. (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 140)

In this passage, again, we are provided only with external details which are related to the time in which they were described. Thus, the temporal setting is only a specific moment which may be considered as "pure present."

Second, the reader is provided with Mrs. McNab's [the lady who is charged to clean the house before Lily Briscoe's and the others' arrival after ten-year absence] subjective thoughts consisting in practical considerations of the task given to her, but they also bring the past back to life:

For there were clothes in the cupboards; they [the Ramsays] had left the clothes in all the bedrooms. What was she to do with them? They had the moth in them – Mrs. Ramsay's things. Poor lady! She would never want *them* [sic] again. . . . She could see her, as she came up the drive with the washing, stooping over the flowers. . . . (148)

Let us notice, that Mrs McNab's active participation in the narration caused again the extension of the temporal nature of the passage. When exploring her thoughts, the reader is exposed not only to her present considerations, but also to the past memories which were aroused by present impressions. Thus, we get once more to Bergson's idea of the inseparability of the past from the present perception which is attributed to human beings.

As proposed by Woolf in her essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” a character is the basis of a good fiction, the writer has to pursue his characters and reveal their minds to the reader in order to experiment with new narrative means, and to extend the temporal nature of a work. The writer can never achieve this when “deserting Mrs Brown” and when he is interested only in details of external reality which surrounds his characters.

3. Temporal Conception in the Novel *Mrs Dalloway*

Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*, published in 1925, is one of her best-known and most read novels. In this novel, if we classify it as the genre of the novel, the reader experiences a single day in London in the company of Mrs Dalloway, her friends and people who are either directly or indirectly in touch with her. To be precise, we do not learn only about the characters' agenda and inner life of that day, but we are also guided through their past lives from which they bear some unresolved afflictions. The past is narrated fragmentally by "instalments," which is the key feature of the so-called "tunnelling process" discussed in this chapter. As in Woolf's other works, namely *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and her short stories "The Mark on the Wall" or "Kew Gardens," there is a central motif, a unifier which represents the centre of the narration, sets the order and temporal frame of the work. In this novel, striking of Big Ben or of some other London's clock centres the novel's characters. London's clock as if represented a character itself, as also hinted at in this chapter.

The novel is not interesting only for its temporal play and various narrative planes, but it may be also conceived as a story about time itself, as proposed by Ricoeur in the second volume of his *Time and Narrative* (101). While reading the novel, the reader is constantly reminded of the inevitable and incessant passage of time. Big Ben measures the physical time of the novel, but also cuts away an hour by hour of the characters' lives. On one hand, the reminder of time makes the characters constantly aware of the limited length of their lives, but on the other hand, it makes them realise that they still live and have to enjoy every moment of their lives. In this aspect, the novel may be regarded as a mournful elegy for time and praising ode to time at once. This double nature of time is often reflected by the characters themselves, it is mostly exhibited in Clarissa's and Septimus' seemingly contrary manners and relation to time.

The passage of time is also projected in Woolf's very poetic and vivid descriptions of London's urban atmosphere. The strong sense of movement, rapidity and haste draws the reader himself in the story, and forces him to follow the passage of time dictated by the strokes of Big Ben and by the author herself. Concerning the physical time of the novel, a single day of June, the intensity of the novel's action is adequately adapted to it. The reader mostly accompanies the characters in the course of executing their everyday tasks. However, even during that single day significant events

happen, as for example Peter Walsh's visit in Mrs Dalloway's house or Septimus Warren Smith's suicide. To apply Woolf's terminology as introduced in "The Sketch of the Past," the novel is equally filled with the intensive moments of being and with seemingly uninteresting moments of "non-being" from which Woolf is able to create very engaging descriptions.

3.1 The Stream of Consciousness as the Main Narrative Technique in *Mrs Dalloway*

It has already been hinted at in the previous chapters that the stream of consciousness technique is the tool frequently used in Woolf's works and that its subjective nature enables the author to plunge into characters' minds. Through the eyes of a character, the writer may provide the reader with various experiences from lives of his characters. From a character's present perception, the reader also learns about their past experience. As also already analysed, perception processes in human brain, according to Henri Bergson, are never isolated to the mere present, but they are always enriched with some past experience.

The term stream of consciousness was first described in William James's scientific work *The Principles of Psychology* (Chapter 15) as the ever-flowing succession of various feeling and thoughts which strike our consciousness:

If the present thought is of A B C D E F G, the next one will be of B C D E F G H, and the one after that of C D E F G H I -- the lingerings of the past dropping successively away, and the incomings of the future making up the loss. These lingerings of old objects, these incomings of new, are the germs of memory and expectation, the retrospective and the prospective sense of time. They give that continuity to consciousness without which it could not be called a stream.

In *Mrs Dalloway* the thoughts of the characters are not expressed directly through the first person narration, as for example in Molly's long stream of consciousness (internal monologue) at the very end of Joyce's *Ulysses*, but they are retold by the narrator. This narrator provides an insight into characters' minds as accurately as if he lived their lives himself. In this regard, he behaves as the omniscient narrator, but contrary to the latter, he does not narrate events in the chronological order. The narrator knows everything about the characters' present and past lives, but he does not "overdose" the reader with this information. More likely, he narrates their stories

“by instalments” until the whole mosaic of their story is pieced together. Formally, these subjective insights are carried out by indirect speech, introduced or concluded by the expressions “she thought” or “he thought”: “Bourton was a nice place, a very nice place, but I could never get on with the old man, he thought” (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 41). However, the introduction of another longer train of thoughts is often missing. Sometimes, the narrator even jumps from the thoughts of one character to the thoughts of another without letting the reader know. In addition, he even inserts a past reflexion of some character into the thoughts of another character as in the “Regent’s Park scene” appearing approximately between the pages 49 and 62. In this section, the reader is deluged with Rezia’s, Septimus’s and Peter’s thoughts and past recollections without being clearly indicated where the thoughts of one character end and the thoughts of another character begin. Even though the scene is set in Regent’s Park, we find ourselves there only sparingly. In the characters’ rumination we are dragged into Warren Smith’s apartment, Bourton or Mrs Dalloway’s house in Westminster. Also, throughout those pages, we are not quite a long time in the present, but rather gathering information from the past to be acquainted with the whole story of Rezia and Septimus’s unfortunate marriage and Peter’s love for Clarissa.

3.2 The “Character” of Big Ben and Other Clocks

Big Ben, its strokes, and the bell strokes of other London’s clocks are one of the central motifs in the novel. It plays an important role, because the strokes accompany the reader throughout the whole novel. On one hand, the clock striking hour by hour creates the temporal frame of the novel. On the other hand, the strokes as if unified all the characters, and reminded us of their common urban setting. This is formally demonstrated by the recurrent sentence: “The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (4). This sentence hints at the imaginary acoustic waves which are created after a bell strikes, and implies that these circles hit all the people in their environments in the same manner as Ricoeur points out: “This sentence, which is repeated three times in the course of the narrative, will of itself recall the sameness of clock time for everyone” (*Time and Narrative* 105). However, the sameness of the clock time for everyone is very explicitly contrasted by the internal subjective perception of the passage of time which is not the same for everyone, but varies with the character who perceives it. Let us closely analyse this discrepancy and various narrative aspects related to Big Ben.

3.21 Chronological Time

As it has already been mentioned, the temporal frame of the novel covers just a single day which is measured by the strokes of Big Ben or other London's clock bells. Clocks strike during the day, and help the characters to organise their agenda of that day, similarly as in our real lives. At the very beginning Big Ben strikes for the first time, and it clearly indicates the beginning of the novel which is dedicated to Mrs Dalloway. She eagerly anticipates the strokes and sound, because it reminds her of her existence. She accepts the strokes with joyful awareness:

First a warning, musical; then the sound, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the weariest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she [Clarissa] felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 4)

Similarly, the novel is concluded, even if it is not in the very last chapter, by the strokes of Big Ben when Clarissa contemplates Septimus's suicide. In this regard, we can also conceive the narrative as circular. We start with Clarissa Dalloway's perception of the bells and we finish the reading of the book with it: "She felt glad that he [Septimus] had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble" (135). The rest of the narrative between these two significant scenes is the scope of the narrative, and the strokes of clock have various functions there as highlighted in the next section.

3.22 Functions of Clock Strokes

In connection to the chronological time determined by Big Ben, its strokes also represent a similar "anchor" or a starting-point, as the snail in "The Mark one the Wall," from which separate parts of the narrative proceed. The latter may be in the form of stream of consciousness, internal monologue, flashback or longer descriptive passage. These separate passages are often introduced, interrupted or concluded by bell sounds:

It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks,

mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke and died up there among the seagulls – twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. (69)

The quoted passage is preceded by a flashback, namely by the narration about Rezia and Septimus's domestic life, its happy moments and crisis. There is also an account about Dr Holmes's visit in their apartment. Then, it is followed by Septimus's present visit in Sir William Bradshaw's surgery. Thus, in this case, the strokes of Big Ben separate the flashback and the actual present event happening during the physical time of the novel. We can also demonstrate on the quoted passage the ability of Big Ben to unify the novel's characters. Although the most of the narrative in this part of the novel was dedicated to Peter Walsh and the Warren Smiths, the author reminds us of Clarissa by means of the phenomenon already mentioned - the sameness of the clock time for everyone.

Sometimes, the strokes of Big Ben or other clock separate the train of thought of various characters and it is often the only indicator of the change in the narrative voice or in the setting of the given passage. Let us demonstrate it on the following extract:

Love and religion! Thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are! For now that the body of Miss Kelman was not before her, it overwhelmed her – the idea (92). . . . Volubly, troublously, the late clock sounded, coming in on the wake of Big Ben, with its lap full of trifles. Beaten up, broken up by the assault of carriages, the brutality of vans, the eager advance of myriads of angular men, of flaunting women, the domes and spires of offices and hospitals, the last relics of this lap full of odds and ends seemed to break, like the spray of an exhausted wave, upon the body of Miss Kilman standing still in the street for a moment to mutter 'It is the flesh'. It was the flesh that she must control. Clarissa Dalloway had insulted her [Miss Kilman]. (93-94)

In this passage the strokes divide, but also unify, the thoughts of Mrs Dalloway and Miss Kilman, the tutor of Clarissa's daughter Elisabeth. Again, it is executed very smoothly as if the leaden circles and sound unified the two's minds that, in fact, ruminate about the same subject. In addition, the reader is again reminded of the common setting of busy London which encircles all the novel's characters.

3.23 Subjective Perception of Time and Monumental Time

Chronological time in the novel is quite strikingly contrasted with the subjective internal perception of time. Contrast is probably not the best word to depict the relation of these two times in the novel, it may be more proper to speak about juxtaposition in this case, because these two times penetrate one to each other in the novel. As it has been already pointed out, the passage of time is reminded to the characters by means of the chronological time to which the characters reveal their relation throughout the novel. Especially Clarissa's and Septimus's subjective perception of time is quite significantly described by their responses to the strokes of Big Ben or other reminders of external, chronologically ordered, reality. Their perception and attitude to the inevitable passage of time is, mainly at the beginning of the novel, obviously different, but approaching the novel's end these two perceptions start to resemble and blend one to each other.

Clarissa Dalloway is from the very beginning of the novel depicted as a joyful character who enjoys life, enjoys every moment of it and rejoices herself at seemingly everyday trifles, for example at beautiful flowers:

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes – so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and through her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. (10)

Clarissa feels happy in London's busy atmosphere. While traversing its streets, she enjoys the perception of multitudes of impressions, she is aware of being the part of that organic universe. These various impressions often remind her of something from her past, which often leads to a longer train of thought or an account on a past event. Her considerations and reveries during that important day are often interrupted by the strokes of Big Ben which drag her back to reality and remind her of the fact how wonderful it is to be alive:

The leaden circles dissolved in the air. . . . In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing

of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (6)

In this passage Clarissa feels very happy about being alive, which is caused by the reminder of the passage of time executed by means of Big Ben's strokes. In fact, the strokes somehow immortalized that moment of June in Clarissa's mind. Another time, the strokes of Big Ben have different impact. They reach Clarissa's ears and serve only as the reminder of the quick passage of time, and force her to hasten the preparations of the evening party: "Three, good Heavens! Three already!" (86). Thus, it seems that Clarissa does not have trouble to accept the inevitable passage of time and its reminder. On the contrary, Septimus suffering from his horrid war experience and consequent mental illness has quite different relation to chronological time, more precisely to the monumental time as described by Ricoeur in his *Time and Narrative*:

This monumental history, in its turn, secretes what I will venture to call a "monumental time," of which chronological time is but the audible expression. To this monumental time belong the figures of authority and power that form the counterweight to the living times experienced by Clarissa and Septimus. . . . (106)

As we know, Septimus is constantly troubled with his past experience and with the reminder of time in any form. He is completely absorbed in his internal thoughts and sorrows, and the external reality, which in fact caused his illness, oppresses him. Many times throughout the book the reader is exposed to Septimus's fearful ruminations, visions or flashbacks. By means of the latter, he escapes from the linear (chronological) temporal order to the non-linearity of his consciousness. He seems to manage just with his imagination, and while he is then dragged back to reality, he is not able to cope with it as the other characters of the novel: "In Septimus the exit from linear perception does not originate a temporary suspension and expansion of time which ends in a re-definition of ordinary perception, but instead marks a more radical and definitive alienation from reality" (Prudente 123). Septimus really cannot bear the weight of the monumental time and regards time as his enemy: "'It is time,' said Rezia. The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane. . .'" (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 53). The monumental time that slowly destroys Septimus is represented by the imperial clock-striking of Big Ben, a royal car passing the street, a plane flying above the park and mainly by his doctors, first Dr Holmes and then Sir William Bradshaw. They both rather bother Septimus than cure

him, they want to re-establish his sense of reality, force him to forget the past, but is it possible? Of course not, for someone so profoundly psychically wounded as Septimus is. He is constantly irritated by Dr Bradshaw's "magic formula" that he has to relax in order to recover his "sense of proportion." The loss of the sense of proportion may hint at several abilities that pose problems to mentally ill people. First, they may not be able to conceive and identify space. Second, they may be troubled with the inability to hold the idea of time. As a result, they as if lived outside the reality determined by space and time. Septimus seems to have problems with the reacquisition of the idea of time. He is absorbed in his inner self and his past, and every reminder of the present reality hurts him more profoundly. For him, Mr Bradshaw, Dr Holmes and people similar to them are only the worshippers of the monumental time; they are completely enslaved in it: "It is this sense of proportion that sets his [Dr Bradshaw's] entire professional and social life within monumental time" (Ricoeur 106). Septimus ridicules Dr Bradshaw's obsession with "normality" (the sense of proportion):

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw, who caught salmon herself and took photographs scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals. Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair. . . . (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 73)

On the contrary, Clarissa does not seem to trouble herself with the acceptance of the monumental time. She feels proud of her husband who represents an important public figure, she willingly organises her snobbish parties for snobbish people and yield to "the goddess of divine proportion." However, at the very end of the novel, Clarissa shows repulsion to the "monumental time." She seems to comprehend fully Septimus's anxiety and his final decision to kill himself provoked by the external world governed by authorities:

Suppose he [Septimus] had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscure evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your soul, that was it – if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not

then said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that? (134)

Then, just for a moment, Clarissa identifies herself with Septimus, she admits that it is sometimes very tempting to escape from all these people and world that torments human soul: “She felt somehow very like him – the young man who killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (135).

Despite of this momentary depressive confession, which probably showed the Clarissa’s second, darker and maybe true nature, she results her rumination in a positive manner, she ends up submitting herself to the pressure of external world, monumental time and its authorities: “The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back - She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room” (135).

Thus, while the reader gets to the very end of the novel, he is suddenly exposed to the Mrs Dalloway’s contradictory nature and her double-sided experience of time. From the beginning of the novel, the reader tends to treat Clarissa and Septimus as counterweights, but reaching the novel’s end, he feels that the weight seems to incline to Septimus’s side. By this means, the reader realises how unbalanced Clarissa’s nature is and how much she, in fact, resembles Septimus who at the very end of the novel commits what she would never be able to do. In fact, the young man nearly represents her “double” (Ricoeur 111) that shows and demonstrates Clarissa’s nostalgic, depressive and anxious feelings that she intentionally conceals from the others.

3.3 The Tunnelling Process

The fragmentation and non-linearity of the novel’s narrative is not only the product of the characters’ consciousness, but it is also prefigured by Woolf’s peculiar method of writing employed in the novel. The method is defined as the “tunnelling process” in her diary’s entries from Monday 15 October 1923 and Thursday 30 August 1923: “I should say a good deal about the Hours [the first thought-out title of the novel *Mrs Dalloway*], and my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea that caves shall connect, and each comes to daylight at the present moment” (Gudz 6). The characters are introduced to us at the very beginning of the novel; we are acquainted with their present situation and mental state. We do not know much about them at that

point. Gradually, through the characters' reflexions, flashbacks or internal thoughts mediated by the narrator or streams of consciousness, we are enabled to penetrate to the characters' past experience. Thus, Woolf digs imaginary holes under and around the characters and these holes are widened and deepened as we learn more about them and their lives. The holes expand to the extent that we should employ Woolf's term 'cave' while speaking further about them. As the narrative proceeds, we learn also about relationships among the characters, and consequently the tunnels are slowly dug between the caves, and the whole mosaic of the characters' interrelationship unfolds before the reader's eyes and in his imagination. The tunnels are constantly created among all the characters and they are finally all interconnected. Even the tunnels belonging to Clarissa and Septimus are connected with the "roundabout" of Sir William Bradshaw's tunnel. As we know, the two characters actually never meet in the novel, and the only character that indirectly relates them is doctor Bradshaw. Mrs Dalloway's party is the culmination of the novel, but it also represents the moment when all the tunnels and caves connect and create more or less clearly arranged network. In addition, the novel ends with the party which takes place in the "present" time and there are no more recollections of the past needed, because the caves are already connected. That is Woolf's intention as stated in her diary.

The tunnelling process is thus another of Woolf's narrative tools that enable her to juxtapose and intermingle the past and the present in her fiction. She combines the passages of "digging" the past through recollections, flashbacks, etc. with passages where she observes the present state of her characters. She tells the story of her characters by "instalments" until she offers the whole account of the past (Prudente 35) which has impact on their present mental state.

4. *To the Lighthouse* as the Pursuit of the Past and Reconciliation with the Past

The novel *To the Lighthouse* was published in 1927 as Woolf's fifth novel. The novel is contemplative and autobiographical to a great extent. The story reminds the reader of Woolf's annual summer vacation spent with her parents and siblings in St. Ives, Cornwall. As in other novels she tries to capture the past, contemplate it, and finally reconcile with it. *To the Lighthouse* tackles Woolf's not simple relationship with her parents (Harris 91-93) and serves not only as an elegy for them, but also as her tool to settle the memories of her parents in her mind as she writes in her diary entry on the 28 November 1928: "I used to think of him [father] and mother daily; but writing *The Lighthouse* laid them in my mind." Let us develop the topic of the pursuit of the past further, mainly to demonstrate it on the narrative structure of the novel. Let us also focus on other aspects of the novel such as the character of Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, the natural time expressed by breaking of waves, the lighthouse as the symbol of something stable and close relation between time and space.

4.1 The Structure of the Novel

The motif of the pursuit of the past is reflected in the novel's structure. The novel is divided into three parts which represent different stages in the lives of the members of the Ramsay family. The parts are called "The Window", "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse." It is often noted that the organisation of the parts may be graphically expressed as the letter "H" (Harris 91). The part "The Window" symbolically representing the past is connected with the present of "The Lighthouse" by the bridge "Time Passes." This bridge reflects the period of ten years that is marked with the absence of the Ramsays in their summer house by the sea.

"The Window" provides the reader with an insight into the Ramsays' family history, introduces the main characters, namely Mrs and Mr Ramsay and Lily Briscoe, and motifs which are important for further development of the novel. Among the latter, the unfulfilled voyage to the lighthouse and Lily Briscoe's unsuccessful painting play the major role in "The Lighthouse" because these themes bear traces of the past and are resolved in the present. Interestingly, the fact that the two major parts of the novel represent the past and the present becomes apparent to the reader when he reaches the passage, or rather the interlude, "Time Passes." Both "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" are written either in the past or present tense, so their temporal frame is not

clearly marked when they are read separately. The reader does not have the impression of a direct temporal continuity between the two parts that rather represent two separate narratives which are loosely connected by the bridge of time in between.

Many moments and events from the more or less idyllic lives of the Ramsays and their friends presented in “The Window” later haunt the characters and force them to pursue these moments and fulfil unaccomplished actions. Lily Briscoe is later haunted by the image of dead Mrs Ramsay and her own clumsy paintings, as Mr Tansley evaluated them. Similarly, Mr Ramsay is also haunted by his son’s wish to accomplish the voyage to the lighthouse which was much supported by his deceased wife.

4.2 The Lighthouse and Waves

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapters that Woolf’s short stories or novels usually have some centring element such as the snail in “The Mark on the Wall” or Big Ben’s strokes in *Mrs Dalloway*. It is the lighthouse and its light strokes that unify the characters, create their common setting and advance the story in *To the Lighthouse*. Moreover, it is the central motif of the novel as mentioned above in the connection with the voyage. It is inevitable for all the characters to face the view of the lighthouse every day. In addition, the lighthouse is indirectly present even in their rooms when its light regularly beams over the sea and the land. The lighthouse is also the steady element that does not decay or die with time, contrary to the desolated house or death of some characters: “The place [the house] was gone to rack and ruin. Only the lighthouse beam entered the rooms for a moment, sent its sudden stare over bed and wall in the darkness of winter, looked with equanimity at the thistle and the swallow, the rat and the straw” (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 150). The lighthouse is not only the unifier, but also something that reminds of life’s rhythm and cycle, similarly as Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway*:

Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her [Mrs Ramsay’s] lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity; and pausing there she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke. . . .
(Woolf, *Lighthouse* 70)

In this passage the lighthouse represents the recurrent reminder of one's life. Clarissa Dalloway also anticipates the strokes of Big Ben in the same way as Mrs Ramsay waits for the light beam of the lighthouse. They are both aware of the regularity of the clock striking or strokes of the lighthouse, it settles them down into the objective external reality.

However, the lighthouse is not the only thing that underlines and reflects one's life rhythm or life cycle and has various effects on the perceiver. Waves are another element executing this function:

. . . the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, 'I am guarding you – I am your support', but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow – this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror. (20)

This passage demonstrates the two-sidedness of time represented by the mechanical sound of breaking waves. On one hand, it is the comforting sound that makes us aware of our lives, but on the other hand, it distresses us, because we realize how our lives vanish in a similar way as the ebb and flow of sea water. The same parallel between human life's time and waves appears in Shakespeare's sonnets, for example in "Sonnet 60":

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forward do contend. (1-4)

Woolf and Shakespeare both often compare human life, or the physical time of human life with natural phenomena that reflect "natural time." The same analogy appears also in Woolf's novel *The Waves* where waves and the movement of the sun in the sky

measure human life but also a single day's time that represents the physical time of the novel.

4.3 Mrs Ramsay as the Centre and Mover of Everything

Mrs Ramsay is probably the central character of the novel, because all the other characters are depicted mainly in relation to her. She reminds us of the deceased mother Addie in William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*. The character of Addie was also similar to an omnipresent aura which affects all the other characters in relation to her despite of the fact that she is dead. She is also the mover of the action of the novel in the same way as Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Most action in this novel is filtered through Mrs Ramsay's eyes and if the action or rather train of thought relates to another character, Mrs Ramsay is mostly present even there. We know her inner thoughts concerning herself but also her thoughts concerning the others. She tries to shape the reality and the others according to her own picture. This is most evident in her effort to create a pleasant environment for all her family and guests even though she dislikes some of them, for example Mr Tansley. She seems to influence indirectly the thoughts of the others, as for example in the dinner scene during which she hosts all the others and tries to unite them: "They all set separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her [Mrs Ramsay]" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 93). She unconsciously foists her thoughts to the others:

I [Mrs Ramsay] am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man [Mr Tansley] there, life will run upon the rocks – indeed I hear the grating and the growling at this minute (100).

This quotation represents Mrs Ramsay's imaginary words as if read in her eyes by Lily Briscoe. The passage serves to demonstrate that Mrs Ramsay is able to permeate into the others' consciousness like a ghost or aura. In this way, Mrs Ramsay operates "like a large body of mass influencing the curvature of spacetime" (Brown 44). By this we get to the influence of the modern physics upon Woolf's writing. She was acquainted with Einstein's and the other physicists' theories with the aid of her father Leslie Stephen and also her friend Bertrand Russell. Mrs Ramsay's close relationship to the others and to inanimate objects and concepts as the light or the house may be regarded as the parallel to the relationships between subatomic particles (51). She

conceives world as the organic unity where her place is relative to the other components of the structure.

Mrs Ramsay's relative nature is also reflected in her ability to seemingly decelerate or accelerate time (45). At the beginning of the novel, she comforts her son James who is depressed by his father's negativism concerning the voyage to the lighthouse, and she evokes in James the feeling of faster passage of time:

'Of course, if it's fine to-morrow,' said Mrs Ramsay. . . . To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 7).

In this passage she modifies James's perception of time merely by her words. On another occasion, she punctually prepares the dinner for her family and guests, and she tries to transform the ordinary time at the table into unforgettable, profound and slow-downed moment. She tries to imprint that moment into the others' memory forever:

The cook has spent three days over the dish. And she must take great care, Mrs. Ramsay thought, dividing into the soft mass, to choose a specially tender piece for William Bankes. And she peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats, and is bay leaves and its wine, and thought, This will celebrate the occasion – a curious sense rising in her, at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival. . . . (109)

Mrs Ramsay does not only want to provide her family and guests with intensive and long-lasting moments, but she also wants to make herself unforgettable. She has the intention to be eternally fixed in the flow of time and be the part of the memories of the others:

They would, she thought, going on again, however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house; and to her too. It flattered her, where she was most susceptible of flattery, to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven; and this, and this, and this, she thought, going upstairs (123)

4.4 The Pursuit of the Past by Lily Briscoe and Mr Ramsay

The image of dead Mrs Ramsay thus constantly haunts the other characters in the section “The Lighthouse.” Lily Briscoe and Mr Ramsay in particular constantly occupy themselves with her, even though she is no longer a part of reality, but lives only in their memories. Lily Briscoe has a very strong relationship with Mrs Ramsay and admires her for everything. She regards Mrs Ramsay as the basis of the house, the place and the family. After Mrs Ramsay’s death, Lily returns to the house after ten years’ absence, and perceives Mrs Ramsay everywhere. She is full of woe and tries to bring the past back by finishing her painting:

‘Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!’ she cried, feeling the old horror come back – to want and want and not to have. Could she inflict that still? . . . Mrs. Ramsay – it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily – sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat. (197)

Lily’s effort to re-create the past by her painting is very demanding, because she has to plunge entirely to the past and detach herself from the present. While recollecting the past in her painting, she undergoes the feeling of ecstasy related to the moments of being and tries to make “of the moment something permanent” (176). She has to overshadow her own existence, and let herself steer only by her memory while completing her picture: “. . . screwing up her eyes and standing back as if to look at her picture, which she was not touching, however, with all her faculties in a trance, frozen over superficially but moving underneath with extreme speed” (218). The ecstasy connected to the act of performing is a circular movement during which the subject plunges deep into reality or past, experiences the feeling of transcendence and then return to the reality, but that reality is seen in a new light (Prudente 8). She recollects the past through small fragments, which reminds us of the tunnelling process: “She went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past” (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 188). The complete painting is thus the result of the past recollections mixed with the traces of Lily’s current perception of the seashore and the lighthouse. For this reason it is conceived rather as the recreation of the past (Prudente 31). Let us suggest that the process of the creation of the painting coincides with Woolf’s process or way of writing. Lily may represent the artist who struggles with his artistic belief and ruminates about her way of artistic creation in the same manner as Woolf does in her essays, for example. Through the character of Lily and her painting Woolf thus offers us an insight

into her vision concerning writing. As it has already been analysed in the previous chapters, Woolf uses narrative techniques that link the present with the past, and her writing is often the result of the juxtaposition of the two temporal spheres. The novel ends with the exposure of Lily's thoughts while completing her painting: "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 226). This process of painting thus helped Lily to organise and settle her memories in her mind and to reconcile herself with the past. We may only speculate whether this reconciliation is parallel to Woolf's own feelings after finishing writing of the novel.

As it has already been mentioned, the pursuit of the past is also projected in Mr Ramsay's desire to accomplish the voyage to the lighthouse that he owes to his son James, and consequently even to his deceased wife. From the beginning of the novel Mr Ramsay gives us the impression that he is very reserved, pessimistic and unbalanced. He constantly seeks for his wife's support and reassurance. He seems to be troubled with the acceptance of changes, and prefers to be "stuck in one place and in a particular point of time." He is much down to earth in his perception and experiencing. He is not gifted with the ability to experience the ecstatic alienation from reality into the depth of his consciousness. In "The Window" he is presented as the main dissenter of the voyage to the lighthouse. After the death of Mrs Ramsay he quite changes his attitude because he loses the feeling of certainty provided by his wife. He thus tries to accomplish what he missed in the past, and by that way he tries to bring the past back similarly as Lily by her painting. In the section "The Lighthouse" he seems to be haunted by the idea of the voyage. He thus undergoes the sail, and finally rewards even his son James. James achieves his dreamt voyage and in addition, he is praised by his father, which means more to him than the sail. It is Lily who finally perceives and resumes Mr Ramsay's reconciliation with the past:

He stood there spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly, compassionately, their final destiny. Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth. (225)

In this way even Mr Ramsay is able to organise his inconsistent and uncertain thoughts concerning the past and his wife's death. He probably undergoes quite significant change of his character. He is able to praise his son and renounce partly his pride that is symbolized by the fall of the imaginary wreath off his head. Some sort of revelation thus affects even Mr Ramsay. Moreover, the novel begins with the idea of going to the lighthouse and it finishes with it. Therefore, the narration may be regarded as circular, similarly as in "The Mark on the Wall" or *Mrs Dalloway*.

4.5 Time Projected as a Spatial Dimension

Time and space are often very closely connected in Woolf's works. Sometimes, time is projected into some spatial element (Ulvydiene 58), for example the distance or magnitude. The novel *To the Lighthouse* provides several examples on which this phenomenon may be demonstrated. The images of distant landscape often represent some temporal dimension, insight to the past or to the future. During the sail to the lighthouse Mr Ramsay realises the distance between their boat and their house on the shore. The distance coincides with the view into the future: "He [Mr Ramsay] had found the house and so seeing it, he had also seen himself there; he had seen himself walking on the terrace, alone. He was walking up and down between the urns; and he seemed to himself very old, and bowed" (181). In this passage Mr Ramsay tackles the feeling of solitude and subjectively experiences a time shift which is provoked by the physical alienation from his house. The actual distance between him and the house thus represents the period of several years and shifts him into the imaginary future. Nearly the same thing happens to his daughter Cam who watches the shore, and she is no longer able to distinguish shapes of the houses because of the great distance: "But Cam could see nothing. She was thinking how all those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they had lived there, were gone: were rubbed out; were past; were unreal . . ." (181). In this passage Cam also experiences the insight into the future or to "timelessness" as concluded from the word "unreal" and the image of the ultimate decay. The most important element in this passage is the paths that may symbolically represent the lives of the Ramsays. Cam points out to the future where their lives may be lost. In another passage Mr Ramsay compares the period of thousands of years to great height: "And what are two thousand years? (asked Mr. Ramsay ironically, staring at the hedge). What, indeed, if you look from a mountain-top down the long wastes of ages?" (41). Woolf thus uses natural elements and spatial dimensions to design some

temporal feature. She weds time and space in order to provide more profound picture of the environment as if she wanted to show what all is behind physical things, and she also unites the characters with their environment in this way. The reader has the feeling that the thoughts of the characters, concerning the time for example, are mirrored in the natural or spatial scene appearing in the novel.

Conclusion

In the four preceding chapters, the thesis aimed to depict Virginia Woolf's conception of time in her short story "The Mark on the Wall," in the essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and in her novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Let us outline and summarise the most important narrative features Woolf uses while treating the phenomenon of time.

Virginia Woolf's writing is based on putting the main emphasis on her characters, as pointed out in the essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown." She tries to provide the reader with an insight into her characters' psyches. She is interested in the process happening in human consciousness while perceiving external reality. This conscious process is always influenced by our experience and memories from the past. In this way, Woolf often links the present and the past, she combines different temporal dimensions of her works. Only her purely impersonal passages, where characters are absent, namely "Time Passes," are marked just by a single temporal plane.

Woolf's connection of the present and the past corresponds with Henri Bergson's idea on conscious perception and the function of memory. According to him, our consciousness works on the principle of the juxtaposition of the present perceptions and past memories, which creates a completely new image penetrated with the present and the past simultaneously. It represents one of the main temporal features of Woolf's writing – the inseparability of the past and the present. Sometimes, the author also foreshadows the future, for example in "The Mark on the Wall" or in *To the Lighthouse*. The reader of Woolf's works is aware of the anxiety raised by the rapid passage of time. Sometimes, the past is linked with traumas, as in the case of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, and with unaccomplished wishes and promises as pointed out in the analysis of *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf novels often serve as a means to pursue the past and reconcile with it. That is most evident in the novel *To the Lighthouse*, partly also in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Another way of writing that reflects the inseparability of the past and the present in human consciousness is the stream of consciousness narrative technique which is based on "lingerings of old objects and incomings of new ones" (James, *Principles*) in our consciousness. This is based on the principle of the succession of perceived images that are gradually replaced by new ones. This writing technique is prevalent in the novel *Mrs Dalloway* that is entirely based on the subjective narration that enables the author to "travel in time."

Moments of being represent other device that enables Woolf to step out from the external chronologically ordered reality into the subjectivity of human consciousness. During this moment, the character is exposed to some intensive external stimulus that makes him alienate himself from the reality and forces him to plunge into his consciousness. Then, the subject (the character) is deluged with a large amount of present and past perceptions and experiences; he gets himself into a sort of ecstatic state and finds himself in a non-linear temporal dimension or rather “timelessness.” Another intensive stimulus of external reality later leads the character back into objective reality. The importance of the moment of being lies in the subject’s ability to perceive multiple images at once and to link different temporal planes of our consciousness.

The fragmentation, and also the temporal fragmentation, of Woolf’s works is achieved by the application of the so-called tunnelling process. As already analysed in the chapter devoted to the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf does not want her readers to be drowned in the flood of details concerning the characters, but she prefers to supply them with smaller doses of the story. These fragments of the story, which are usually not given in chronological order and link the past and the present, help the reader to tunnel his way towards the end of Woolf’s novel. The tunnels of all the characters are interconnected at the very end of the novel, and the whole mosaic of the story, which reminds us of impressionist paintings, is completed.

Apart from specific writing methods, Woolf applies several other elements to enrich her temporal play. Her works usually have some kind of unifier that sets her characters in the given place and time. To be precise, it is Big Ben in *Mrs Dalloway*, the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse* and the snail in “The Mark on the Wall.” The unifier usually reminds the characters of time, helps them to orient themselves in time and counts the hours of their lives. Woolf contrasts this quite logical and obvious function of the unifier with her characters’ subjective perception of time and their attitude to the concept of time itself. The ambiguity of the positive and negative perception of time is most vivid in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, namely while analysing Clarissa’s and Septimus’s relationship to the reminder of time. Thus, Woolf is interested in the juxtaposition of the chronological time, or the monumental time, and subjectively perceived time. The unifier also has the function of something stable that does not decay with time, unlike human lives, people’s happiness or propriety. Woolf’s works are often based on circular construction, they start with the unifier and end with it, for example in “The Mark on the Wall” and *To the Lighthouse* where the narration circles around the

snail and the lighthouse. This circularity also enables the author to plunge her characters to their consciousness and past. The unifier is the steady point anchored in the present and the starting point for the characters' subjective ruminations.

Other elements worth reminding in connection with Woolf treatment of time are her ability to project a period of time on a spatial dimension, for example distance or height, and her tendency to project human life, one's life cycle on natural phenomena, such as waves breaking on the seashore. These two means also allow her to avoid purely impersonal descriptions in her fiction. The crucial element of Woolf's fiction is thus her struggle for representation of her characters' subjective reality in contrast to the external, impersonal reality. As a result, her characters and readers confront the discrepancy between the chronological time and their subjective perception of time.

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