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Time, Memory, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*

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Time, Memory, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and
Between the Acts

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This Thesis, “Time, Memory, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*”, by Nicole Olivotti has been approved for submission for the

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Abstract

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway emerges as a character gripped by the notion and passage of time. Woolf represents the chronological aspect of time through images such as Big Ben and its relentless chimes as well as the various references to clocks or bells throughout the novel. *To the Lighthouse* also thematically and narratively explores constructions of time, particularly by focusing on elements such as inaction and delay. The journey to the Lighthouse, for example, does not occur until the end of the novel. Both texts underscore the tension between the linear timeframe of the novel and the narrative elements that delay the action of the story. A similar pattern appears in Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*—and although antithetical to *Mrs. Dalloway*—also depicts various modes of time through the juxtaposition of the historical pageant play and the consciousness of the characters and audience. The notion of time—and indeed, the temporal experiences of the characters—is woven into the consciousness of the characters in each of the novels. In various instances, representations of time summon memories or associations with the past, present, or future. *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*, intersect at moments where modes of time or memory expose the character's consciousness and it is through this intersection that Woolf underscores the manner in which the narratives take on meaning.

Time, Memory, and Consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and
Between the Acts

“The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but it is then that I am living most fully in the present.”

--Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”

Mrs Dalloway, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts* demonstrate a dynamic between time, memory, and consciousness and the way in which the novels' characters come to terms with their past in the present moment. For Woolf, the task of the modern writer was to record “atoms as they fall upon the mind” (“Modern Fiction” 150). Time, memory, and consciousness, then, are the modes through which Woolf explores the workings of the mind. *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts* illustrate the self as relational to time—both experienced time and objective time—which presupposes consciousness as a link to the world. Each text invests in the ideas of the past, present, and future and engages with constructions of time in modern postwar British society. *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* explore the interplay between the convergence of phases of time and the characters' memories and, more importantly, the way in which this interplay shapes their relationships in the novels. *Between the Acts* is antithetical to both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in that it is a communal narrative which replaces the concept of the self with the idea of community as well as the individual narrative—such as Clarissa Dalloway's or Mrs. Ramsay's—with a communal narrative; however, the convergence of the past and present provides further insight into the role of time and moments of consciousness for Woolf's characters.

Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* provides a comprehensive historical framework that illustrates the impact of technology upon abstract notions of time and space throughout the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Kern argues that the human understanding of abstract concepts such as distance, time, and space were radically altered by the development of railroads and steamships as well as the invention of automobiles, electricity, and telecommunication (9). New innovations in technology not only shaped "the mode of time and space that is its subject," but also challenged the traditional social hierarchies that previously governed society (9). Kern also addresses the concept of public and private time during the July Crisis and the outbreak of World War I; he ultimately suggests that the new technological advances that influenced representations of time and space were instrumental in the War's outbreak. Kern reveals a direct connection between changes in new philosophical ideas about time and space and its form in cultural and social relations, specifically, how philosophical and technological changes affected everyday life.

Kern references Einstein's calculations of time in relation to his findings on gravitational force and gravitational fields in his 1905 theory of relativity. Einstein calculated that time "in one reference system moving away at a constant velocity appears to slow down when viewed from another system at rest relative to it, and in his general theory of relativity of 1916 he extended the theory to that of the time change to accelerated bodies" (19). Einstein's theory underscores a dynamic sense of time where time is relative to the observer, or the "accelerated body." Einstein's theory posits that "since every bit of matter in the universe generates a gravitational force and since gravity is equivalent to acceleration... 'every reference body has its own particular time'" (Kern 19). All temporal units, according to Einstein's theory, are relative to their own specific reference points. Woolf demonstrates a contemplation of these principles

not only in “Modern Fiction,” where she argues that the novelist must “trace” patterns of temporal relativity, but also in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts* in which she explicates the concept of time as a textual discourse that interacts with the characters’ consciousnesses and the events of their day.

Michael Whitworth also examines shared metaphors within literature and science—as well as their governing tropes and themes— in early twentieth-century Britain. His study begins by addressing the debates between post-war “popularizers,” such as Arthur Eddington, J.W.N. Sullivan, and James Jeans, who focused on breaking away from Victorian modes of science that emphasized mechanical visualizations of matter. Post-war popularizers instead constructed a “new physics” that also demonstrated the philosophical principles of physics. Whitworth notes that the circulation of these ideas within the British science and literary communities would form the basis that led to a new understanding of science and reality during the modern period. Whitworth provides a comprehensive examination that exhibits the frequent exchange of ideas, images, and theories between the two communities. Modernist writers, Whitworth asserts, have often been treated as indifferent to or “hostile” to science; however, modernist writers fluidly engaged with the conversations circulating around science and literary metaphor “not in spite of a literary hostility to mechanistic science, but because of that hostility” (145). Whitworth devotes the last three chapters of his study to the works of Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot and suggests that each artist provides new methods of representing scientific theories, such as the theory of the atom or spatial relativity, that become central components in the modern novel. Whitworth ultimately links the history of various scientific theories—particularly, the concept of simultaneity, which is central to Einstein’s theory of relativity, the developing theory of the atom, and pre-Einsteinian notions of force and the body—to their literary counterparts:

metaphor, representations of time and space, and the relationship between the individual and memory.

Ann Banfield's "Remembrance and Tense Past" explores the relationship between time and modernism in Woolf's novels. Although Banfield's study does not address aspects of post-war modernity that are external to the genre of the novel (technology, philosophy, or developments in the arts), her exploration of time passing in separate but still moments in contrast to scientific "spatialized time" applies to Woolf's conception of time, which is that time operates in a series of isolated moments rather than as chronologically durational. Banfield notes that unlike the nineteenth-century novel that saw the mind and the external world as a "confrontation between private and public history: history disrupted the private life, invading the novel's traditional domestic sphere," the twentieth-century novel, instead, saw interiority as divorced from history (49). Experienced time and subjective time "now became identical with real time; the rift between this time and that of the objective world was complete" (Banfield 49). In the modern novel, history "bursts into private life" and "increasingly breaks into a character's train of thought, disturbs an abstracted, distracted state, because history itself has receded to such an incomprehensible distance, become an impersonal force" (Banfield 50). As a result, Banfield argues that "the modernist novel does not omit history; it shows its new face" (50). The "Time Passes" section in *To the Lighthouse*, for example, establishes a division in the novel's history not only by marking a break in the novel itself and in time, but also by creating a "before and after" of the character's lives. Mrs. Ramsay's, Prue's, and Andrew's deaths, narrated in brackets, anchor past moments in the present time. Once a moment occurs, Banfield notes, it becomes unchangeable and belongs to history (50).

Banfield's "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time" pursues the relationship between various philosophical theories of time posed by Woolf's contemporaries such as, Alfred North Whitehead, G.E. Moore, Roger Fry, and Bertrand Russell, and Woolf's narrative experiments on representations of time. Banfield examines Woolf's "dualist" aesthetic, that stems from the shift of Impressionism to Post-Impressionism (476). Although common conjecture identifies Woolf's conception of time as "Bergsonian," Banfield posits that Woolf "sought to fashion the short story into a form more complete while yet retaining Impressionism's breakthroughs" (478). Roger Fry's early concept of Impressionism reveals the idea that Impressionism illustrates "a momentary group of sensations in perpetual flux" rather than "a separate and self-contained object' such as a human figure" (477). Fry later revises his critique of Impressionism and concludes that the "separate forms' of objects [such as] chairs, tables, human faces and bodies...are lost in the whole continuum of sensation" (478). Post-Impressionism underscores the relationship between "separate forms of objects" and their surroundings in which the objects and their surroundings are inseparable. This distinction, Banfield notes, not only influences the beginning stages of Woolf's theories of time, but also provides Woolf with the necessary "literary aesthetic needed to convert Fry's spatial categories into temporal versions of his dualism of 'vision and design'" (478). Woolf's transition from the short story to the novel, then, was not simply a matter of "transformation;" instead, Banfield argues that Woolf chose a "more elegant solution" that is greater than "mere expansion in length:" the idea of time occurring in separate moments (477). For Woolf, time ultimately occurs in layers of moments and each moment is indeed a "crystallization" of various thoughts, sensations, and sensory experiences.

Although Paul Tolliver Brown's discussion of spatial topography focuses solely on the relationship between the post-war London landscape and time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, his argument that *Mrs. Dalloway* is the first text in which Woolf's "character's spatiotemporal perceptions are directly linked to the setting they inhabit," underscores the larger idea that space, time, location, and consciousness operate interactively (24). Brown further interprets that Woolf creates a "fluid spatiotemporal dimension," suggesting that, when applied to *Mrs Dalloway*, not only do "her characters inhabit a relative setting," but also that "time and space are dynamic qualities" which are "incredibly interactive and not always in apparent step with the characters who live there" (25). While Big Ben and the characters who "roam London's streets" appear to share "the same perspective of time and space" and as a result, "are moving at a slightly faster pace than their presumably stationary environs," the thoughts of the characters suggest the contrary. The characters in *Mrs Dalloway* "are consumed by their lives before the war while Big Ben persists in announcing the present hour in a London that has moved on despite them" (25). Big Ben—and through Big Ben, the passing of time—suggests that the time the characters experience is not concurrent with the physical time that Big Ben's chiming indicates. Brown posits that although Big Ben represents "an authoritative sense of" the modern mechanistic London—and by extension, the modern present— "it cannot reasonably dictate a universal point of view" (25). The characters in *Mrs Dalloway*, ranging from the main characters, Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith, and Peter Walsh to the people roaming the streets of London, "are caught in a historical transition that is moving apace more rapidly than they are. As they struggle to keep up, many of them move into a new era almost begrudgingly, even as the harbingers of that new era call out to them" (25). Brown ultimately posits that the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* are in motion with respect to one another, their geographic location, and their surrounding landmarks. Each

character interprets the day's events in their own distinct way, which not only introduces various viewpoints throughout the novel, but also, as Brown argues, reflects a changing social landscape in postwar London.

Woolf's exploration of time stems from her argument in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that the main concern of the novelist should be the examination and development of the character. Woolf asserts that "our Mrs. Brown" is "the spirit we live by, life itself" (119). Her analysis of Mrs. Brown begins by declaring, first, that "all human relations have shifted...and when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (97). For Woolf, if human character changes, then the role of the novelist is to capture the character. Woolf questions what makes a character "real" and "who are the judges of reality?" (193). The great novels Woolf references—*War and Peace*, *Vanity Fair*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Madame Bovary*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Major of Casterbridge*, *Villette*—share a "character who has seemed to you so real...that it has the power to make you think not merely of itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes...all these great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character" (193). Woolf demonstrates the idea that characters are ultimately developed through their consciousness and it is the work of the writer to understand and illustrate a character's consciousness.

Woolf's perception of time and chronology grows directly out of her notion of character expressed in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Subsequent to her criticism of the Edwardians, particularly, Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy, she maintains that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (96). The year 1910 also coincides with Woolf's close friend, Roger Fry's, First Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London (Quick 547). Fry's exhibition revealed new perceptions of reality that reflected new ideas about

time, space, and perspective. Fry arranged fourteen paintings by Paul Cézanne and eight works by Edouard Manet, which created a series of “vigorous chromatic splendor” using “intense greens and blues” to visually suggest the idea of continuity and unity (548-49). Fry’s curation of the images also suggested a “rhythmic[ally] spatial” relationship (549). According to Quick, by “abandon[ing] the obsession with the ‘descriptive imitation of natural forms’ (what Virginia Woolf calls ‘description of reality’)” the modern artist could create “a *sensation* of space” (emphasis added) instead of an “illusion of actual space” (559). The picture—and by extension, the novel—must have “an existence of its own, not a merely borrowed or reflected existence” which the modern artist achieves by creating sensations of reality rather than imitations of it (559). Banfield notes that Fry’s critique of the Impressionists presents the concept of continuity as “a series of discrete elements, the atoms of visual experience analyzed, for which Post-Impressionism must contribute the design” (478). Woolf’s exploration of character affirms Fry’s understanding of space, “successive unity,” and reality. Woolf’s argument in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” ultimately reveals that the modern character, like Fry’s exhibition, must convey reality in a more personal and connected way, especially in relation to the superficial Edwardian characters Woolf criticizes.

Banfield further notes that G.E. Moore also delivered a series of lectures in 1910-11, one of which was entitled, “Is Time Real?” Here, Moore argues against the British Hegelian philosophic notion that “Time is unreal” (Banfield 475). Like Moore, Bertrand Russell also addresses conceptions of time and its temporal realities. Bergson’s concept of time states that only “experienced time—*la durée*—is real time;” however, Russell asserts a dualist theory of time which distinguishes between two modes of time: “Physical and Perceptual Space-Time” or “public and private time” (Banfield 479). Russell, unlike Bergson and Moore, considers

“physical time as real time. Time really passes, but abstractly and objectively” (Banfield 479). Russell’s distinction between abstract and objective time, or “inner time” and “actual time,” prompts Woolf to incorporate a literary impressionism into a form which does not stop with impressionism. It is the conception of real time as physical time...that provides her with a temporal counterpart to Fry’s Post-Impressionist spatial design” (479). Woolf’s work conflates Russell and Moore’s philosophic modes of time; however, Woolf is particularly interested in *how* the characters perceive their relative world and the manner in which the world takes on meaning through their conscious thoughts.

Banfield writes that “like Fry, then, Russell thought that an analysis of sensation was necessary to reveal...a temporal version of Impressionism’s atomized appearances”; likewise, Russell and Moore’s notion of experienced time “consists of a succession of distinct, noninterpenetrating units” which can also be referenced as “moments” (480). Considering Woolf’s examination of character in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” the “self” is defined by the consciousness of the character and by the manner in which the characters both perceive and experience their relative world. Russell and Moore’s temporal analyses underscore the idea that the self and time—inner time and objective time—are relational; therefore, what the characters’ consciousnesses experience, have already experienced, and expect to experience binds together in these dimensions of temporality. Woolf joins modes of experienced time, which Russell and Moore describe as noninterpenetrating units, with chronological time and consciousness. For Woolf, then, time and consciousness are *interpenetrating* entities within which objective time and inner time fuse together in a continuous flow that becomes the essence of the characters’ realities. Although Woolf’s characters experience time subjectively, they share an “inner time consciousness” in an objective way. *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* lie in between these

two modes of time, both of which are connected through consciousness. *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* exhibit the parallel between inner time and objective time, which exist separately until the characters' memories re-render chronological time in the narrative. *In Between the Acts*, Woolf's final novel, ultimately embodies the interpenetration of each mode of time she examines in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

To reflect the change in human character and relations, Woolf asserts in her essay, "Modern Fiction," that the novelist must "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall...trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" (150). The writer who is "constrained...by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant...to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability" simply fills the pages of their work "in the customary way" (149). If Woolf's notion of the "self" is defined primarily by the consciousness of the character, then the "self" must also be constituted by the way in which her consciousness interacts with and experiences "each sight or incident" in their day. Woolf writes that in order for the novelist to rebel against the "unscrupulous tyrant," he or she must:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions--trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there...life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (150).

To examine time in Woolf's novels is to consider how the "myriad of impressions" that the mind receives temporally shapes the experiences of the characters, their consciousness, and sense of self. Time and consciousness are interpenetrating entities, which the modern novelist must embody in various dimensions of the novel.

Although several critics engage with Woolf's use of scientific discourse, Kern specifically discusses the conversation surrounding the atomistic nature of time during the modern period. Kern states that in addition to Einstein's theories, Newton's calculus of time was also extraordinarily influential. Newton's calculus posited that time is the sum of infinitesimally small but discrete units (Kern 20). Clocks, in particular, "produced audible reminders of the atomistic nature of time with each tick and visible representations of it with their calibrations" (20). Kern further notes, "Newton believed that no occurrence in the material world could affect the flow of time"; however, Einstein challenged Newton's idea about the interaction of matter and time and argued that "the relative motion between an observer and an object makes the passage of time of the object appear to go more slowly than if it were observed from a point at rest with respect to it" (30). Einstein and Newton's argument parallel Woolf's investigation of consciousness and the characters' interactions with each sight or "impression" they observe throughout their day. Woolf's argument in "Modern Fiction" challenges classical theories about time and she aptly asserts that the novelist must capture the multiplicity of atomized impressions that the characters receive, which vary from character to character and moment to moment.

Although the tension between multiple realms of time vary among Woolf's novels, she particularly develops the structural relationship between objective time, inner time, and the character's consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts*. Woolf associates chronological time with cyclical actions and objects such as the passing of ten years in

the “Time Passes” section of *To the Lighthouse* and the striking of clocks and bells in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example, Big Ben’s chimes summon memories or signal changes in streams of consciousness and thought. Additionally, *Mrs. Dalloway* expresses chronological time not only through its association with objects that represent time passing, but also through the characters—particularly Clarissa and Septimus—who are synchronized with audible expressions of time throughout the novel. Although the events of the novel appear to be limited to one day in June 1923, the tension between modes of time, consciousness, and memory carve out a much richer sense of time than the one-day time span in which the novel takes place.

To the Lighthouse, written two years after *Mrs Dalloway*, joins the two modes of time, objective time and subjective time, expressed in *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf experiments with more complex notions of time by weaving the two modes together. Time in *Mrs. Dalloway* occurs alongside the characters—such as Big Ben chiming while Clarissa walks down Regent Street—whereas *To the Lighthouse* weaves objective time and inner time into the fabric of the novel. The very structure of the novel conveys a sense of simultaneity in that the events in first section, “The Window,” develop until they are engulfed by the tragedies that occur in the second section, “Time Passes.” The events from “The Window” reappear in the last section, “The Lighthouse,” as if the events are a continuation of the first section; however, “Time Passes” reaffirms the notion that ten years have in fact passed between the first and third part of the novel. Joan Bennett specifically addresses how the novel “marks time” in human events—through the bracketed narration of Mrs. Ramsay’s, Prue’s, and Andrew’s death—and how it measures time in the “natural world.” Bennett writes that “it is not merely a particular ten years that is represented, but time in relation to eternity, the short span of mortal lives, contrasted with the recurring seasons and the enduring world” (105). She notes that not only is the passing of ten years

“marked and scarred” by “the history of the Ramsay family” but also “linked with the history of England and the first European war” (104). By narrating Mrs. Ramsay’s, Prue’s, and Andrew’s death in brackets as interpolations in the novel, Woolf demonstrates the necessity of linking experienced—and indeed, human—time with objective time. Objective “world time” may be indifferent to the tragic human events that mark the story; however, the novel underscores the harmonious dynamic between the passing of objective time and experienced time, despite how discordant the relationship may appear to be.

The perpetual link between the past and present that Woolf so clearly captures in *Mrs. Dalloway* consistently relates to the characters’ consciousnesses. The self—the consciousness of the character experienced against a changing background of moments in time—is fundamental to temporal relations in the novel. Past and present conjoin through the consciousness of the characters, particularly, in Clarissa and Septimus, thus revealing a dynamic in which time and the self become unified, creating moments in the narrative which fall outside of chronological time. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the events of the text span a lovely summer day in June 1923.

Narratively, the text weaves together two strands of events. The first strand involves Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class woman, approximately fifty years old, who is having a party that evening at her home. The second thread follows the story of Septimus Smith, a veteran of World War I, who suffers from the traumatic post-effects of the war and commits suicide. Septimus’ suicide is announced at Clarissa’s party, which not only ties the narrative thread together, but also joins these two moments in time.

While Big Ben’s chimes represent the mechanistic movement of objective time, its chiming also punctuates changes in consciousness and pulls the events of the day forward. More specifically, Big Ben expresses objective time as “clock time” in which the “body is a clock”

(Banfield 55). In the opening pages of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa waits to cross the street while pondering how many years she has lived in Westminster and it is during this moment that Big Ben strikes: “There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical, the hour, *irrevocable* (emphasis added). The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (Woolf 4). Immediately, the novel reveals the tension between objective time and experienced time in the striking of Big Ben, which highlights the present moment in time and by contrast, the consciousness and emotions of the character’s thoughts. The characters in the novel are a part of “private worlds” that are in motion relative to one another. It is a post-relativity world: “each has its own clock, keeping its own time— ‘separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronization’” (Banfield 55). Woolf, however, does create a system of synchronization through Big Ben’s chimes, which trigger shifts in perspectives, memories, thoughts, and from “one point in space-time to another...the effect is cinematic, as if characters pass from frame to frame” (Banfield 55). Clarissa pauses “even in the midst of traffic...in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans” (4) and experiences an interior moment in which she thinks about her love for her life in London. Big Ben’s chimes “catch characters at different points on the map consulting the time and connect the private moments” (Banfield 55). The scene emphasizes the power of individual consciousness and how it coexists with chronological time and its identifiers.

Big Ben and the audible chiming that the characters hear throughout the novel also functions as a mechanism that divides the novel into temporal sections. The first section occurs while Clarissa walks through London, Septimus and his wife, Lucrezia or Rezia, sit together in Regents Park. Suffering from shell-shock, Septimus believes that he sees the figure of a fallen soldier, Evans, walking in the park. Although Clarissa and Septimus are in the same moment in time chronologically, Septimus experiences time in a disordered and psychologically fragmented

way. Septimus' interminable suffering prevents him from engaging with his consciousness in a reflective way, which Clarissa is able to do. Septimus simultaneously notices beauty while envisioning a Skye terrier transforming into a man (59). Time, once again, interjects his stream of consciousness: "The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white imperishable, words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time" (59). When Rezia asks, "The time Septimus...what is the time?" the quarter hour strikes—"the quarter to twelve" (60). It is Big Ben that answers Rezia's question, "what is the time" and further underscores Septimus' disconnection from reality. Brown notes that Woolf emphasizes a "spatiotemporal change" by contrasting Septimus' dark inner thoughts with the beauty of Regent's Park—a beauty that he is also very aware of. By paralleling this scene with the scene of Clarissa walking through London at the same moment in time, Brown aptly asserts that Woolf explores a change in "spatiotemporal perception...[through] a shell-shocked central character who is incapable of situating himself in a circumscribed presence in space or a present moment in time. The irrevocably damaged Septimus Warren Smith fails to integrate back into a society that is no longer mechanistic, in part because he experiences a boundless sense of spatiality" (29). The novel consistently situates Septimus'—and Clarissa's—consciousness within a post-war space/time framework that contrasts with objective time and its representations.

In addition to Big Ben, St. Margaret's chimes are another chronological force of time within the novel. After Clarissa returns from her shopping trip, she has a brief encounter with Miss Kilman, "a Christian...woman who had taken her daughter from her...in touch with invisible presences," and Clarissa ponders the question of religion while she watches her elderly neighbor from her window (106). Big Ben, first, interjects her thoughts:

Big Ben struck the half-hour. How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go-- but where? Clarissa tried to follow her as she turned and disappeared, and could still just see her white cap moving at the back of the bedroom...here was one room; there another (108).

If the novel rejects Big Ben's pronouncement of time, it must, then, offer an alternative with which to replace it. The following paragraph illustrates St. Margaret's chimes as a more appropriate alternative. As opposed to Big Ben's chimes, which "forces" the elderly neighbor "to move, to go" as if "attached to that sound, that string," St. Margaret's chimes, "the other clock...which always struck two minutes after Big Ben" underscores the idea that there are, as the novel proposes, two present moments within one singular moment in time (108). Oliver comments on the parallel between Big Ben's and St. Margaret's chimes and asserts that, "St. Margaret's doesn't really contradict Big Ben's declaration of the present. Rather, St. Margaret's highlights a new conception regarding the meaning of "the present." Big Ben can legitimately pronounce the hour like it has always done, but in the modern era it can no longer assert that hour as universal" (33). Big Ben's and St. Margaret's pronouncement of time blends multiple moments in the present together with Clarissa's consciousness to underscore the novel's sense of simultaneity and the character's relative position to present time.

The idea of multiple present moments, or "relative simultaneity," is defined by Alfred Einstein's theory of relativity. Whitworth explores Einstein's principle of simultaneity in

significant detail and more importantly, how modernist writers such as Woolf explored concepts and metaphors in relation to Einstein's scientific theories. "At some point in the early twentieth century," Whitworth writes, "the concept of simultaneity changed: to say that two events were simultaneous was no longer to say that they happened at the same time, with reference to an absolute framework of space and time, but to say that they were perceived simultaneously" (170). Whitworth notes that Woolf most likely knew of Einstein's theories before they were popularized; however, the significance of the relative simultaneity in *Mrs Dalloway* is not that Woolf was perhaps influenced by Einstein's theories, but rather, that she demonstrates this principle by orchestrating scenes in which characters experience time differently although they are in the same moment—and in many instances, the same setting. Big Ben and St. Margaret pronounce the same hour for each character; however, the hour is relative to each character's consciousness and point of view.

The lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse* functions analogously to Big Ben. Both objects create an effect of simultaneity which makes the past eternally present. Whitworth comments on the constant presence of the past and notes that it is particularly troubling "or even terrifying" in its relation to the Great War by "sublimating" its terrors and creating a sense that "we can never escape the past" (171). Although the eternal presence of the past in the present moment is unquestionably a terrifying experience for characters such as Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf expresses this tension differently in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf establishes the idea that the characters possess a sense of belonging to their past, which she accomplishes through the relationship between the characters of the novel and the lighthouse.

Eric Levy conducts a phenomenological study of *To the Lighthouse* in which he discusses how the past and future are connected to the object of the lighthouse. Although Levy

mainly focuses on temporal trauma and the destructive forces of time in the novel, he also examines representations of the “nature of time as it is for human experience” through the image of the lighthouse and its beam. The lighthouse beam links the lighthouse to the Ramsay’s house and constitutes a “coherence of time” in the present moment (119). The lighthouse’s moving beam, Levy writes, symbolizes the “moving present” and “sequentially confers the property of presentness on each successive event that it traverses (118). The passing of the present—explicated in the second section, “Time Passes”—by contrast, leaves destruction in its wake. Levy asserts that the “moving present”—represented by the lighthouse’s beam— does not disrupt the stability of the Ramsay’s temporal order, whereas the passing of the present destabilizes “the stability of succession” (118). In order to reorganize what Levy refers to as “the coherence of time,” *To the Lighthouse* positions the image of the lighthouse as the only object that is fixed, literally and figuratively, within the novel and threads the past, present, and future together. The journey to the lighthouse does not take place until the very end of the novel and as “time passes,” it is the one element that is “immune from change, and shines out...in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby...that endures” (Woolf 105).

The novel illustrates the beam of the lighthouse as “strokes” or pulsations of light. In “The Window,” while Mrs. Ramsay reads to James by the window, she notices, “in his eyes, as the interest of the story died away in them, something else take its place; something wondering, pale, like the reflection of a light, which at once made him gaze and marvel...sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the Lighthouse. It had been lit” (61). In the following chapter, noting the rhythmic stroking of the lighthouse beam, Mrs. Ramsay knits a pair of socks and gazes out of the window towards the lighthouse: “she looked out to meet that stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady

stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke, for watching them in this mood always at this hour one could not help attaching oneself to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke” (63). Mrs. Ramsay, “sitting and looking, sitting and looking” repeats to herself, “‘children don’t forget, children don’t forget’ . . .it will end, it will end. It will come, it will come” (63). The phrases Mrs. Ramsay repeats to herself mirror the movement of the lighthouse beam’s strokes in an extraordinarily rhythmic way. Levy notes that the lighthouse—and its beam—ultimately “enables and represents a perspective disclosing the continuity of one experience. . . .where successive impressions constitute an ongoing presence” (Levy 119). Although the structure of the novel represents successive moments in time as well as different modes of objective time, the image of the lighthouse and the manifestation of the beam consistently unify the overall structure by rhythmically creating a sense of continuity throughout the novel.

While the image of the lighthouse—through its stable and continuous force—threads the three sections of the novel together, Woolf also sought simultaneity in the ending “so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time.” While writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wonders, in her diary, whether Lily Briscoe or Mr. Ramsay should close the novel, but ultimately decides that they would achieve their goals simultaneously: Lily would finish her painting and Mr. Ramsay would sail to the lighthouse with two of his children:

The problem is how to bring Lily & Mr R[amsay]. together & make a combination of interest at the end. I am feathering about with various ideas. The last chapter which I begin tomorrow is In the Boat: I had meant to end with R. climbing on to the rock. If so, what becomes [of] Lily & her picture? Should there be a final page about her & Carmichael looking at the picture & summing up R.'s character? In that case I lose the

intensity of the moment. If this intervenes, between R. & the lighthouse, there's too much chop & change, I think. Could I do it in a parenthesis? so that one had the sense of reading the two things at the same time? (Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 3 106).

Woolf's technique of simultaneously balancing two narratives underscores the way in which the novel establishes the idea of coexisting moments. Banfield also notes the diagram Woolf included in her notes accompanying *To the Lighthouse* in which Woolf draws the structure of the novel in the shape of an "H" where the center line, representing the "Time Passes" section functions as a "bridge" between the first and last sections (500). Banfield asserts that in "Time Passes," "the characters remain ignorant of time's passing—that is the point. They are within the moment, where all is still; time's movement is imperceptible" (503). However, while the moments in the brackets, usually recounting a death, are "still" or static, outside the brackets is the flow of time, represented by Mrs. McNab's revival of the Ramsay's house to prepare for the family's return after the ten-year break and the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew. As Jane Marcus has said, "Mrs. McNab's jouissance is a politics and poetics of life over death" and "Mrs. McNab's song is the ancient noise of life itself" (Marcus 7, 13).

Part I of *To Lighthouse*, "The Window," takes place in the September just preceding World War I on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. Mrs. Ramsay is the focal point of the first section; however, her spatial relation to the window illustrates various symbolic overtones. Mrs. Ramsay's deep-rooted desire to preserve, protect, and nurture her family permeates the first section of the novel. The novel paints her as a loving and tolerant mother and all who know her are mesmerized by her great kindness and nurturance, especially Lily Briscoe, who will attempt to capture Mrs. Ramsay's ephemerality in her painting ten years later. Mrs. Ramsay spends the afternoon in the first section of the novel sitting at the window of their summer home knitting

with her son, James, seated beneath her cutting Army and Navy clippings out of a catalogue (Woolf 31). Simultaneously, Mr. Ramsay walks outside and looks at Mrs. Ramsay and James through the window, or more significantly, a pane of glass. Not only does the window function as a frame for that particular moment between Mrs. Ramsay and James, but also as an object that reflects the centrality of Mrs. Ramsay's role within the family unit.

Irene Yoon discusses the use of glass within Woolf's novels and states that they are a reflection of "wartime anxiety about the breakability of glass or its scarcity in early twentieth-century urban spaces" and also highlight "'moments of creative intensity,' a figuration for the 'reciprocal fusion between the perceiver and the perceived'" (Lee qtd. in Yoon 49). Mrs. Ramsay, "getting up...stood at the window with the reddish-brown stocking in her hands, partly to turn away from him [Mr. Ramsay], partly because she remembered how beautiful it often is—the sea at night. But she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her" (Woolf 123). Without speaking, the text reveals Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts: "she knew what he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. Will you not tell me just for once that you love me...then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned...and looked at him...for though she had no said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it" (Woolf 124). Yoon references what Sigfried Gideon called "the architectural realization of 'the conception of space-time' in the manner of Picasso's *L'Arlesienne* (51). Glass, here, creates "an experience of 'various levels of reference, or of points of references, and simultaneity'" (Gideon qtd. Yoon). Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay gaze out of the window towards the sea and Mr. Ramsay's thoughts are "transparent" to Mrs. Ramsay. The window offers a moment of mutual understanding and also appropriates "the architectural realization of modernist free indirect discourse, in which... 'people may not *know*

(original emphasis) one another's thoughts in telepathic communication, but they *are* (original emphasis) another's thoughts; whatever order there is to consciousness arrives in the momentary interconnections of inchoateness" (Wicke qtd. in Yoon 51). Mrs. Ramsay looks out at the sea, noticing its vast beauty, while also interiorly communicating with Mr. Ramsay. The text fuses the reflective elements of the image of the window to underscore the relationship between the viewer—Mrs. Ramsay—and who or what is simultaneously viewed.

Yoon further comments on the idea of simultaneous viewpoints and argues that it also raises questions about a "certain glaring omnipresence," which is that of World War I. The window in the closing section of "The Window" reflects the moment in the present while also serving as the barrier between the secure past and the destructive future, since, this is the last scene before "Time Passes" begins. Nature's "dark side" moves throughout "Time Passes" and wages battle against the Ramsay's summer house and the spirit of the home. "Well, we must wait for the future to show," Mr. Bankes states, but "it's almost too dark to see" and so, "with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began" (Woolf 125). The object of glass—and by extension, the window—"materially intervenes and physically separates" (Yoon 52). Not only does Woolf recognize this, but it also "becomes more urgent when one considers that for Woolf's generation the past that is overlaid by the present and future is saturated with the often inscrutable experience of the First World War" (Yoon 53). The window, then, calls "attention to anxieties about allowing the wartime past to permeate our sense of the present and future" and is essential in identifying the temporal relationship between the first and second sections of the novel (Yoon 53). "Time Passes" engulfs the human and familial component in "The Window" and instead, replaces it with the destructive forces of war and death.

Although much scholarship explores the role of twentieth-century science and philosophy in Woolf's work, scant distinction has been made between memories that the novel portrays as sudden, involuntary, or abruptly triggered by an object, place, or character and those that the characters voluntarily contrive in order to recapture moments from their past. Given Woolf's exploration of transparency and simultaneity, her work suggests that there is a temporal separation between the characters and their memories, which illuminates a concern about memory today, specifically, who possesses "access" to an individual's past experiences and how can individuals reconcile the tension between the role of the observer and the observed. By integrating multiple temporal and spatial dimensions—as well as incorporating transparent images such as windows and mirrors—in her novels, Woolf considers how individuals recall moments from their past in order to reckon with the present moment. Additionally, characters such as Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway attempt not only to recapture the past, but also to halt the progression of time in the present. While recalling the past and halting time in the present may seem antithetical to the modernist movement, Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway are indeed both representative of the need to preserve or restore the stability of pre-war Britain. Woolf brilliantly creates an aesthetic out of catastrophe by hinting at the idea that while memories of the past consistently penetrate the present moment, Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa Dalloway, for example, seek only to achieve a sense of harmony and return to a space in time before their "world" became disordered.

While writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf acknowledges the role her past and memory plays during her composition of the novel. Through *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf finally "lays her parents to rest" and reproduces her memories in the text. Woolf writes in "A Sketch of the Past:"

It is perfectly true that she [her mother] obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking around Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary rush...when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and laid it to rest (81).

Woolf also writes that the “moments” she remembers during her summer’s in St. Ives with her family were “more real than the present moment” (67). Memory plays a significant role in the “moments” that she refers to where there is a merging of time, memories, and feelings. *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs Dalloway* expand upon the idea of the moment by illustrating modes of time (past, present, and future) that interpenetrate; however, the relationship between the idea of the moment and memory is instead one of consolidation where the moment *holds* the past, present, and future in concentration and is not fleeting—like time—but rather, eternal and timeless.

In the third and final section, “The Lighthouse,” the death of Mrs. Ramsay continues to haunt Lily. Lily remembers Mrs. Ramsay, “that woman in grey” who was not simply “a ghost, air, nothingness” (266). During this poignant moment, Lily realizes that she can “suddenly put her hand out” and wring the heart (266). Memory, in this instance, intensifies Lily’s recollection of the past and the way in which life seemed to derive meaning through Mrs. Ramsay:

There were daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This that, the other; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying, ‘Life stand still here’; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was

the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos, there was shape; this external passing and flowing was struck by stability. Life stand still, Mrs. Ramsay said. Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay! she repeated. She owed it all to her (241).

Lily's connection to Mrs. Ramsay appears to mirror Woolf's own desire to recapture the memory of her own mother. As memory and consciousness merge together in the narrative, Lily recognizes that her memories can "bring back" Mrs. Ramsay, "that woman in grey," which allows Lily to experience and re-experience Mrs. Ramsay's image repeatedly. While Lily roams through the Ramsay's house, she spots Mr. Carmichael lying on the lawn and is suddenly overcome with memories of Mrs. Ramsay that allow Lily to re-experience, only for a moment, Mrs. Ramsay's ability to bring beauty and fullness to life: "she [Lily] felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence...then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return" (180). Lily continuously collects and re-collects memories of Mrs. Ramsay after her return to their home; however, what triggers her memories—and possibly visions—is the way in which Lily experiences the past. Mrs. Ramsay is the "object" of Lily's consciousness; her desire to preserve Mrs. Ramsay's image and all that Mrs. Ramsay represents requires Lily to reproduce her internalized image of Mrs. Ramsay in her artwork.

Lily's memories of Mrs. Ramsay are inseparable from her artwork. Similar to the "great, apparently involuntary rush" that Woolf experienced when she composed *To the Lighthouse*, Lily's memories trigger a sudden explosion of creation that "press[es] on her eyeballs... as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted [and] she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers" (159). In the moments that Lily recalls

Mrs. Ramsay, which particularly occur when she paints, she “los[es] consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance” (159). Her mind “throw[s] up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space” (159) and as “she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there” (172). In the novel’s final scene, Lily concretizes the series of visions she has experienced and finishes 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” (208-09). Lily’s vision, which is also the last line of the novel, is both authentic and epiphanic; she pulls Mrs. Ramsay out of the novel’s temporal flow—where she lives in memories and in the characters’ consciousnesses—and makes her vision of Mrs. Ramsay everlasting and permanent. Past, present, and future coexist during this moment in which Lily joins temporal coexistence into one victorious and solitary brush stroke.

Woolf’s final novel, *Between the Acts*, is Woolf’s closing statement on time and consciousness. Woolf began working on *Between the Acts* (originally named *Poyntzet Hall*) in 1938 and completed it in 1941. While writing *Between the Acts*, Woolf was also composing Roger Fry’s biography as well as her own memoir. In 1938, during the early stages of Woolf’s work on the novel, she wrote about her plan to “sketch out a new book” in her diary:

only don’t please impose that huge burden on me again...let it be random & tentative; something I can blow of a morning, to relieve myself of Roger; don’t, I implore, lay down a scheme; call in all the cosmic immensities; & force my tired & diffident brain to embrace another whole – all parts contributing – not yet awhile. But to amuse myself let me note: why not Poyntzet Hall: a centre: all lit. discussed in connection with real little

incongruous living humour; & anything that comes into my head; but “I” rejected: ‘We’ substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? “We” ...composed of many different things...we all life, all art, all waifs & strays – a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole (Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. 5 135).

Woolf’s entry indicates—specifically, through the substitution of “I” with “We”— that *Between the Acts* would focus on collective consciousness instead of individual consciousness. While the characters in *Between the Acts* are less introspective and less complex than characters such as Lily Briscoe and Clarissa Dalloway, they instead underscore Woolf’s desire to express the communal “we” that the novel argues is the future of human nature.

The plot of the novel takes place within a twenty-four-hour timespan on a summer evening in June. Woolf formulates the structure of the text as a “play within a play” in a “remote village in the very heart of England” (15). The annual pageant play depicts the history of England in three chronologically ordered Acts: The Elizabethan, Augustan, and Victorian ages. Lastly, the epilogue of the play represents contemporary England. The final scene in both the text and the play consists of the actors holding up a mirror to the audience so that they see their reflections in them. At this moment in the play, the actors shift from the villagers on stage to the audience, which sees their reflections. A pattern similar to *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* emerges in the final mirror scene: the novel achieves a sense of unity by pulling characters out of temporal flow and experiencing a final “vision” where past, present, and future coexist. However, in the *communal* vision that concludes *Between the Acts* Woolf reorders the private visions of communion that conclude the previous two novels, such as Lily’s experience completing her painting during the final moment of *To the Lighthouse*, or Peter Walsh’s moment of “terror, . . . ecstasy” and “extraordinary excitement” when Clarissa walks into the room and

rejoins the party in the final scene of *Mrs Dalloway*: “It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was” (165). In each novel, inner time consciousness transcends objective time through a remarkable vision, either personal or communal, that depicts a time in space where multiple levels of temporality converge.

The tension between objective/subjective time and inner/outer time that Woolf so deeply explores in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* is resolved in *Between the Acts*; however, the resolution is a nightmarish one. Facing the imminence of a second World War, Woolf’s vision is darker. When “the hands of the clock had stopped”—denoting the cessation of objective time—and the audience can see themselves reflected in the mirrors, they can see nothing beyond the present moment and certainly, no depth beyond the surface of their reflections. Woolf’s final narrative statement on time suggests that perhaps, reconciliation with the past and future is impossible: “the past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river...but to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary...any break...causes me extreme distress; it breaks; it shallows; it turns the depth into hard thin splinters...let me then, like a child advancing with bare feet into a cold river, descend again into that stream” (“A Sketch of the Past” 98). In her post-WWI novels, through the collective consciousnesses and visions of Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Septimus Smith, Lily Briscoe, Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf reinforces the notion that the past is eternally present. *Between the Acts* engages with another day in June, darker than the June day of *Mrs Dalloway*, and suggests that unless humanity faces its reflection, there will be no “peace” that would allow humanity to slide “over the depths of the past” (98). While chronological time moves on, *Between the Acts* marks the lull between the past of the First World War and the future of the impending Second World War, a reoccurrence of the destructive forces of war that haunt *Mrs*

Dalloway and *To the Lighthouse*. Combined, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Between the Acts* narratively achieve the “unified whole” of time, memory, and consciousness that Woolf set out to complete.

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