

The Philosophy of Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*

by

Erica B. Willis

A thesis submitted to the Department of English  
of the State University of New York College at Brockport,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

June, 2006

**The Philosophy of Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves***

by Erica B. Willis

Approved: Miss Laly  
Advisor

Date: May 30, 2006

Paul R. Bell  
Reader

June 27, 2006

Paul D. Dugersoll  
Reader

June 27, 2006

Mike  
Chair, Graduate Committee

6-30-06

James  
Chair, Department of English

6-30-06

*To my DP  
thank you for not letting me give up*

*and for Lois Arlene Willis  
who would have been proud*

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Woolf's "Thinking in Common"	3
Chapter Two: <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> and Henri Bergson	27
Chapter Six: <i>Orlando</i> and Albert Einstein	43
Chapter Seven: <i>The Waves</i> and Friedrich Nietzsche	61
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	72
Works Cited	78

## Introduction

The philosophy of time is a topic that has been discussed amongst philosophers, scholars, and critics alike for centuries. It is the purpose of this paper not to suggest that Virginia Woolf invented new theories on this subject, but rather that the way she expressed preexisting theories was revolutionary. The intent is to examine three of her works, specifically *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves* in light of the three philosophical and scientific temporal theories of Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, and Friedrich Nietzsche. This study has three main goals — to show that the examination of time is a process that has obsessed centuries of writers, intellectuals, and scholars; to demonstrate Woolf’s belief that the concept of time is a human construction; and to expose Woolf’s view of literature as a historical epistemological “thinking in common,” to coin a phrase from *A Room of One’s Own*, that was essential to its exploration. Woolf believed that human beings are interconnected in ways that can not be fully understood. The only way to begin to understand, therefore, is to explore.

Some may believe that the key to understanding Woolf’s innermost opinions on literature, society, religion, or philosophy is by scouring her diary. However, some of the most powerful statements that Woolf makes are through her characters, who, in essence, are her stand-ins for her own experimentation with different theories of time and reality. By then examining these texts with this in mind, coupled with theories of time that had been well established by the scientific and philosophical communities, one can get a more complete sense of Virginia Woolf.

Finally, if we can agree with Woolf that each book continues the one that came before, then examining her work in this way allows us a greater understanding of all literature. Percy Shelley wrote that anyone “in the infancy of art [who] observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results... those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word (Shelley 791). We must include Woolf in this definition, and we must understand that the greatest success of such poets is that they lift the veil of time, reality, and consciousness to allow for differing interpretations of these subjects. Without them to carry on what came before them, the noble purposes of language would be lost to the world.

*Both in thought and in feeling, even though time is real,  
to realize the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom.*

—Bertrand Russell

Within the progenitive category of philosophy, the theories of time, reality, and consciousness — subjects that have since been discussed for centuries — are rooted in the visions of such thinkers as Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and St. Augustine.<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf's literature often explores and focuses on the same ideas as those forerunners. These topics are essential to the study of modern literature; as Louis Gillet once stated, "Whatever is most valuable in modern literature is a meditation on the nature of time, on the mystery of memory and personality" (Kohler 15). The renewed explorations of time, reality, and consciousness during the modern period, then, demanded new outlets, new forms, and new voices.<sup>2</sup> Though these ideas are thousands of years old, modern writers "make it new," as Ezra Pound stated, insofar that the subjects are presented in innovative form and style. These innovations create the misleading impression that the ideas are unique to the modern period. Though modern originality of form sometimes clouds the fact that Woolf's study of time is not wholly original, her exploration and examination of the philosophical theories of time is demonstrative of its continued epistemological discourse.

---

<sup>1</sup> This in no way precludes the theories of Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Kant, et al.; for the purposes of this study, the theories of time, reality and consciousness within this paper will focus on the tradition of these particular thinkers.

<sup>2</sup> In his discussion of stream of consciousness and its relation to William James and Henri Bergson, Humphrey makes a similar claim: "Thus flux and *durée* are aspects of psychic life for which new methods of narration had to be developed if writers were to depict them" (Humphrey 120).

This study is threefold: to show that the examination of time is a continued epistemological discourse on a subject that has been sustained for thousands of years; to demonstrate Woolf's belief that the concept of time is a human construction; and as a reflection of her constructionist viewpoint, to demonstrate how three novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, resonate with the theories of Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, and Friedrich Nietzsche,<sup>3</sup> respectively, by examining the distinctly individual narrative realities they contain in reference to Woolf's shifting conception of the nature of time. A selective explication of these three novels reveals a telling association with the theories that they represent most fully, while also acknowledging the influence of the others.

Woolf's oeuvre includes ten novels, several nonfiction essay collections including *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, and *Moments of Being*, short story collections including *Mrs. Dalloway's Party* and *Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, collections of literary criticism such as *The Common Reader* and its second volume of the same name, more than five hundred periodical essays, six volumes of letters, and a diary collection that stretches into five volumes. Perusing a list of Virginia Woolf's titles — *Night and Day*, *Monday or Tuesday*, *The Years*, *The Moment and Other Essays*, *Moments of Being*, and *The Hours* (the original working title for *Mrs. Dalloway* (*Diary* 4: 249)) — exposes her preoccupation with time. However, novels such as *Orlando* and *The Waves*, both of which will be examined in

---

<sup>3</sup> Of these three contemporaries, Woolf never met any of them, though many critics feel that “her novels apparently respond to their works and employ their ideas” (Whitworth 147).

this study, have titles that do not foreground the conception of time, though its discussion is prioritized.

Woolf's diaries provide insight into her inspirations for these novels, and are often used by critics to verify her knowledge of and interest in the subject matter that the novels cover. Critics opposing the influence of Bergson, Nietzsche, or Einstein on Woolf's work are quick to point out that Woolf made no mention of them in her diaries, thereby challenging the claim that they influenced her writing. Others, such as Hasler, attempt to evade the discussion entirely, claiming only that "[t]he novelist's private notes show that the experience of time as described in her novels arises out of her own sense of life" (Hasler 146). Still others, such as McNeillie and Kohler, are skeptical, arguing that Woolf's avid attention to Greek scholars (most notably Plato) overshadows the possibility of any contemporary influence on her writing and that "the influence of Bergson upon writers like Proust and Virginia Woolf is still debatable" (Kohler 16). However, critics such as Whitworth, Kumar, and Lee, who focus on Bergson's influence, assert that Woolf shares a Bergsonian sense of time regardless of what her diaries say. Whitworth, specifically, defends his stance by stating that "Bergsonism was part of the intellectual atmosphere of the years from 1910 to 1912, as Einstein was to be in the years from 1919 to 1930" (Whitworth 147), and further, that Einstein's books were reviewed in many of the same publications that Woolf "was contributing to or was associated with" (Whitworth 306) at that time.

While Bergson frequently arises in studies of Woolf's use of the concept of time, it is difficult to uncover critical references to Nietzsche or Einstein. However,

with the competing schools of thought on Woolf's philosophy, it is important to recognize that these theories can be used as a lens through which to study Woolf's novels, regardless of whether she was personally familiar with the material. The discussion of what Woolf believed to be the human constructed concept of time is more relevant when discussed in this way.

The universality of thinking (or passing of the torch) from Plato to Aristotle, St. Augustine to Kant, from Bergson to Woolf, and so on to contemporary authors, is a central to the study of Woolf's novels that deal with the concept of time. Her interest in this intellectual lineage is well supported by her own writing, as well as that of critics. Woolf attended classes in Greek, History, and Latin (McNeillie 8), which led to her study of Virgil, Plato, and other Greek philosophers whose theories were later echoed in her own writing. "Her studies in it were to continue throughout her life, often with great practical intensity, as she made translations and notes, reading and re-reading the poets, philosophers and dramatists" (McNeillie 8). We see evidence of Woolf's interest in Plato, for example, in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Sally "read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 35).

Apart from the opinions of critics, Woolf states the relevance of this intellectual lineage in her own voice. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues:

Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten

poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice (*A Room of One's Own* 68-9).

Similar to Woolf's example above, Bergson, Nietzsche, and Einstein could not have written without Newton, nor Newton without Kant, nor Kant without Galileo, nor Galileo without Augustine, nor Augustine without Plato. As Woolf's masterpieces are comprised of "many years of thinking in common" with such scholars as Bergson, Nietzsche, and Einstein, their writing is not only complementary to Woolf's work, but is in some way responsible for its birth.

Later, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf extends this idea. She states: "books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (84). If book C is a continuation of book B, and book B a continuation of book A, then Woolf again suggests a passing of the torch in writing. Books trace the historical thinking in common, and since history is partly the passage of time, then the study of that passing time is concerned with a lineage. Woolf describes "any great figure of the past" (113) as an "inheritor as well as an originator" (113), going on to state that Shakespeare's sister will come back to life, "drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born" (118). The intellectual lineage and its importance to present writing is an issue that Woolf raises several times in this text, suggesting its significance to her ideology of literature. The

critical legitimacy of examining the connections between Woolf's writing and that of her predecessors and contemporaries can be validated within her own work on the concept of time.

Time, according to Henry James, is "that side of the novelist's effort — the side of most difficulty and thereby of most dignity — which consists in giving the sense of duration, of the lapse and accumulation of time. This is altogether to my view the stiffest problem that the artist in fiction has to tackle" (James 349). What James neglects to mention is that time is subject to complex systems of taxonomy, and that one must identify which system is being used to fully explore the subject. One categorization of time is the developmental stages of the human aging process (birth, youth, mid-life, old age, and death), and another by periods in history (the division of centuries, major wars and battles, divisions of countries, scientific inventions and revolutions, religious reformations, etc.). Yet, there is a wider notion of time that is sometimes avoided in postmodern criticism of modern literature; that is the measure of time by human experience and human consciousness. This latter concept is often Woolf's focus. Therefore, there is something insufficient in limiting the literary analysis of her novels to one of the more obvious subcategories of time, such as human development or historicity.

In addition to the "thinking in common" that she suggests in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's exploration and measure of time by human experience and consciousness supports the critical connections between her writing and that of the thinkers, philosophers, scholars, and scientists that came well before her own age,

such as St. Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's theories of time as recorded in *Confessions* do not always directly correlate to Woolf's writing, as it is difficult to approach Augustine as a secular writer. Yet, his record is one of the earliest, and is an important inclusion in the study of the philosophy of time because it continued original, non-extant Greek writing on the subject. The chapter entitled "Time and Eternity" serves the purpose of directly questioning God on the nature of time, and his conclusions stood unchallenged "until Kant's theory thirteen centuries later (which some see as a mere development of Augustine's original idea)" (Strathern 27-8).<sup>4</sup>

Augustine believed that time was subjective, establishing at least a tenuous connection between he and Woolf. However, he felt that the subjective conception of time, or time as measured by humans, was necessary to our perception of the world. Augustine argued that 'true time,' or that in which God lives, exists outside of human consciousness and functions independently of the subjective structures that human beings place on it. Although her writing supports the former, Woolf rejects Augustine's idea of 'true time'; to her it is possible, and practiced in literature, to slow down and speed up time to show the workings of human consciousness.

Augustine framed his discussion of time around his belief in God, whereas many modern writers did not believe in God's existence. As stated, it is challenging to read Woolf in Augustinian terms given that he was devoutly religious and she was

---

<sup>4</sup> A major difference between the theories of Augustine and Kant is the notion of 'true time' as handed down by God. Augustine's belief in God necessitated the existence of true time, while Kant challenged this claim.

quite the opposite. Yet, God can be a link between Augustine and the modern writers. Although atheism was popular among the modern writers, they had not removed God from their discourse; rather, they seem to have been just as obsessed with the idea as Augustine. The subject of theology repeatedly arises in novels, short stories, and many other works from this period. T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and C.S. Lewis, to name only a few, remained devoutly religious and defended their beliefs in their writing. However, others used religious belief to negatively frame certain characters and their actions, as evidenced by Doris Kilman in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Eupheus 'Doc' Hines in William Faulkner's *Light in August*, and Cardinal Manning in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*. These characters are portrayed as being perversely evil as a result of their godly beliefs. Though Woolf's use of the God concept opposes Augustine's, the use of theology to advance ideas is a strong commonality between the two.

Augustine's theological questions in reference to time form the basis of "Time and Eternity" in *Confessions*. In it, he discusses two main categories of time; time as recognized by humans, and true time as experienced by God. An interpretation of Augustine's sense of the three diminutions of human time is "[t]he past is the presence in the mind of things remembered and the future is the present anticipation of events based on the memory of past experience. The present is simply current sensory experience" (Hergenbahn 67). While both past and future are dependent on the present, future also relies on the past. Time as experienced by God, or 'the eternal,' is a state of time that is separate from past and future. Augustine states:

In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present. But no time is wholly present. It will see that all past time is driven backwards by the future, and all future time is the consequent of the past, and all past and future are created and set on their course by that which is always present. Who will lay hold on the human heart to make it still, so that it can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past times? Can my hand have the strength for this? Can the hand of my mouth by mere speech achieve so great a thing (Chadwick 229)?

Here Augustine defines eternity as being void of past and future, something that God experiences but that humanity cannot understand. This is because lived time contains past, present, and future. To humans, the past becomes progressively further away because the coming of the future pushes the past back. The future happens the way that it does because of what happened in the past. The present, always being our current state, defines what becomes the past and what will be in the future. Eternity is similar in that it is always in the present state, so it is what determines the past and future. Augustine asks God if there is a way for humanity to understand the way that time works in eternity, and if his discussion of it is powerful enough to educate them.

After Augustine defines the three states of time (past, present, and future), he attempts to precisely define their duration. According to Augustine:

One hour is itself constituted of fugitive moments. Whatever part of it has flown away is past. What remains to it is future. If we can think of some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous

moments, that alone is what we can call ‘present.’ And this time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration (Pine-Coffin 269).

Moments passing by become the past, and the moments that have not yet occurred are the future. The present, however, is elusive. Though he can define *what* the present is, Augustine suggests that the possibility of defining precisely *how long it lasts* is far more complicated. He claims that the length of the present may be too short to consider a part of true time.

Augustine then questions if two of these states of time (past and future) can exist by any means since they are not present time. He states:

Of these three divisions, then, how can two, the past and the future *be*, when the past no longer is and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time but eternity (Pine-Coffin 264).

Augustine again asks what time truly is. What parts of time exist if the past is no longer, the present is too fleeting to be measured, and the future has not yet arrived?

Augustine states that the present must move into the past or it can no longer be contained within the conventional category of time, for it has no potential for becoming the past, which is the natural progression of all time — even future time.

“In other words, we cannot rightly say that time *is*, except by reason of its impending state of *not being*” (Pine-Coffin 264). This is Augustine’s dilemma.

A contemporary example of Augustine's dilemma is the film technique that qualifies the time frame as 'present day.' Viewers take this to mean that the action happens in their current year (or at least in one that is relatively close to it). By doing this, filmmakers impose their own subjective definition of present time.<sup>5i</sup> But the length of the present certainly can be much shorter than one year. This leads directly into the idea of constructionism, which Augustine did not entirely subscribe to as it relies on the absence of God.

By the time she began writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's notion of time had shifted away from the rigid measurements offered by those following traditional categorization, and began to focus on human experience and consciousness. Like many modern writers, Woolf was influenced by her belief in atheism, which suggests a strong deviation from the beliefs of St. Augustine. Modern philosophers and scholars asserted that if God did not exist, then true time could not exist. Once God was taken out of the equation, the explanation for the origin of the concept of time rested with humans. This revelation helps introduce the ideology of constructionism, which gives humans the power to create their own subjective concepts and realities. To some modern writers, time became one of these human constructed concepts. They shifted what had been seen as the immutable and eternal structures of time through a variety of techniques and variations of form in literature.

---

<sup>5</sup> Humphrey uses this same analogy in his discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway* and stream-of-consciousness: "The interplay between the motion picture and fiction in the twentieth century provides material for an enlightening and enormously valuable study" (49). Humphrey's analysis follows in endnotes.

There are many examples in support of the constructionist notion of time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, but the way that Woolf expresses it fluctuates. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, which has no chapter divisions, Woolf exposes an entire human life in the confines of one narrative day, embracing a Bergsonian approach to the concept of time. In *Orlando*, chapter divisions are numbered and come at specifically chosen turning points in the narrative while a biographer narrates the novel. The main character lives through four centuries and a gender change, suggestive of an Einsteinian relativism regarding time. *The Waves* is comprised of both structural techniques. In unlabeled chapters the characters speak in soliloquy and narrate their own lives from early childhood to old age. Juxtaposed with the chapters are italicized interludes that trace the path of the sun through one day, representing one human lifespan. The novel evokes imagery with subtle undercurrents of Nietzschean circularity. These are three distinctly different novels, each expressing a different construction of time through a different narrative style. In so doing, Woolf creates three different narrative realities that exist within three individual time structures. Viewing these novels together demonstrates that she had adopted a constructionist view of time.

Woolf's experimentation within these novels is notable. Her contribution to original form and style is evident in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves* through her use of the stream of consciousness technique.<sup>6</sup> Stream of consciousness, perhaps the most

---

<sup>6</sup> The importance of Woolf's use of stream of consciousness rests in the notion that "[t]he spirit of each age requires a different literary treatment" (Lee 146). Otherwise, the feeling of the new era would be expressed through an outdated style, and would risk inadequate representation. Woolf was not the founder, nor the solitary user of this narrative device; stream of consciousness can be seen in the

famous modern narrative technique, puts the constant flow of a character's thoughts onto the written page, thereby creating a novel representation of the concept of time. The technique performs several other literary functions within any given text: to set the pace for the piece of writing, to either increase or decrease the tension of the character's action or inaction, or to otherwise make the reader intimate with the character on a much higher level than omniscient or first person narration achieves. Stream of consciousness came about as novelists attempted to create "the modern novel of sensibility in all its preoccupation with form. The idea of the novel as 'a direct impression of life' — the phrase comes from Henry James — implies a filtering of experience through an individual sensibility" (Kohler 15). Using stream of consciousness to aid in the creation of alternate realities on the page is one way that Woolf's notion of the passage of time could be demonstrated in her writing.

Woolf's innovation with the stream of consciousness technique can be expanded upon by again reviewing the author's own words:

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, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from the old; the moment of importance came not here but there... Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however

disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness (*Common Reader* 213).

This famous quote, used repeatedly in studies of Woolf's fiction, reveals her desire to use new forms to convey the function of the human mind on the page. Here Woolf imagines particular moments of being, or experiences received by the human mind. The potential reception of these experiences by the mind is immeasurable since the same experience is recorded differently if any variable in the experience changes. How, then, can these moments be recorded in a novel? The stream of consciousness technique makes "the reader feel he is in direct contact with the life represented in the book" (Humphrey 15), and, therefore, by using this technique, Woolf was able to express her characters' falling atoms more accurately by placing readers directly within the minds of the characters.

However, Woolf's stream of consciousness narrative is also fine-tuned, chiseled prose with a direct purpose. She wanted to record the atoms "in the order in which they fall," rendering fluid and organized prose. It follows a particular sense of order and design lacking in many of her contemporaries, such as James Joyce or Marcel Proust. The form risks the disconnection and incoherence mentioned above, but Woolf carefully traces the pattern for the reader, allowing it to emerge with clarity in her writing. By using such techniques and constructed notions of time in her work, Woolf left herself open to identification with contemporaries like Nietzsche, Bergson, and Einstein.

Nietzsche's position on the concept of time is that there are "no abstract truths waiting to be discovered by all, there [are] only individual perspectives" (Hergenhahn 192).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, there is no Augustinian 'true time' — humans have the power to define how long the present is and how long ago past events must have taken place in order to be considered past. This is aligned with the constructionist point of view; the individual defines 'truth,' thereby creating many truths, each equally acceptable. Though Nietzsche did not expend his greatest effort on the concept of time, he did outline a theory of eternal recurrence in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Eternal recurrence is the idea of living one's life and choices again and again for eternity. Within this theory, Nietzsche suggests personal consequences for poorly chosen actions. His point is that humanity must make good choices or risk suffering eternally (and repetitively) for the bad ones.

*Thus Spake Zarathustra* is the story of the title character's voyage to the top of a mountain, upon which he finds a gate. The gate has two faces, with two roads going in opposite directions, forming a circle. "They are antithetical to one another, these roads; they directly abut on one another: — and it is here, at this gateway, that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: 'This Moment'" (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 108). These paths diametrically oppose one another, yet meet at the gate, allowing Zarathustra to reexamine his understanding of the concept of time. Upon discovering these paths, the discussion between Zarathustra and the

---

<sup>7</sup> Again suggesting a lineage of philosophical thought, Nietzsche's conclusion that God was dead and that humanity was responsible for killing Him is not entirely original, either, as Georg Hegel had professed it some twenty years before Nietzsche was born (Strathern 14).

dwarf on his shoulders quickly becomes complicated. However, the message of the section is thus: “‘Everything straight lieth,’ murmured the dwarf, contemptuously, ‘All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle’” (108). Zarathustra’s enlightenment leads him to believe that everything that has ever come along this path must have already existed. It is here that Nietzsche defines the idea of eternal recurrence by way of questioning, in a manner reminiscent of Plato’s *Euthyphro*:

Must not whatever *can* run its course of all things, have already run along that lane? Must not whatever *can* happen of all things have already happened, resulted and gone by? And if everything has already existed, what thinkest thou, dwarf, of This Moment? Must not this gateway also — have already existed? And are not all things closely bound together in such ways that This Moment draweth all coming things after it? *Consequently* — itself also (108)?

Zarathustra realizes that time is a circle through logical questioning. If every possible event has already passed the gate, every event (including present and future events) must be past. If everything is past, then the gate itself (which is in the present) has already existed. Since past, present, and future are “closely bound together,” the gate must pull everything that has not happened yet around to meet the rest. Further, if time is a circle and there is no beginning nor end, then everything that exists now has existed before and will exist again in the future.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Again, the discussion of time has a historical lineage: Zeno, Seneca, and Epicurus of Samos (who, like Nietzsche, rejected the existence of supernatural forces in exchange for natural explanations) first suggested the idea of recurrence more than two thousand years prior to Nietzsche.

Fragments of Nietzsche's theory can be found in Woolf's work. As Louis' character in *The Waves* brings up the past civilizations that exist within him, Woolf suggests that the ancient world remains in the present, akin to Faulkner's belief that "[t]he past is not dead. In fact, it's not even past" (Moncur 1). The spirit of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and the continuation of the past within the present are connected. Both suggest the repetition of every point in history, as is shown through Louis' character. Further, Nietzsche's theory suggests that the past revisits the present and the future in a cyclical pattern. The symbol of the circle is an important one; it is presented repeatedly in Woolf's novels in the loop of light in *The Waves*, the gold circle that is the wedding band in *Orlando*, and the circular clocks that chime throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*.

While Nietzsche asserts that time circles back on itself, Henri Bergson substitutes that circular imagery with linear duration. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson states, "consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstances may still be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they find him at a new moment of his history" (*Creative Evolution* 8). This is a direct antithesis to Nietzsche's viewpoint, and is aligned with Heraclitus, who believed that "you can never step into the same river twice" (Robinson 18), suggesting that time continues; the world is constantly in a state of movement, or flux. Bergson is of the opinion that a repeated event occurring to the same person, and perhaps under the same circumstances, cannot have the same effect on that person since he has traveled further along his own linear path of time. "We could not live over again a single

moment, for we should have to begin by effacing the memory of all that had followed. Even could we erase this memory from our intellect, we could not from our will” (8). To Bergson, the eradication of our intellect and our will must take place to experience the same state of consciousness more than once, and that is impossible since we are in a constant state of flux.

This is not to say that Bergson believes that the past, present, and future have no connection. Bergson defines duration as “the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation” (7). Bergson states that the past is not only an essential counterpart of the future, but is also responsible for its birth (as Woolf’s forerunners are responsible for the birth of her writing). He also maintains that the past will continue to grow and be preserved in the present regardless of how much time passes.

Yet, to Bergson, time is not as simple as past, present and future. Aside from the Augustinian diminutions of concrete time, Bergson believes that there are two distinctly different *types* of time that must be accounted for. Contemporary criticism tends to most often refer to these either as abstract versus concrete time, clock time versus mind time, or temps versus durée. Abstract time, according to Bergson, “enters into our speculations on artificial systems” (25) and concrete time is that “along which a real system develops” (25). When discussing these two concepts of time, Bergson relates their measurement to points in space, or a metaphorical graph on which different points (or correspondences, as Bergson refers to them) are plotted.

Temps, clock-time, or “[t]he abstract time  $t$  attributed by science... consists only in a certain number of simultaneities or more generally of correspondences, and that number remains the same, whatever be the nature of the intervals between the correspondences” (11-12). This measure of time counts only the points themselves.

To describe mind-time, Bergson uses an analogy:

If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like (12-13).

Bergson’s subjective impatience makes it seem as if the sugar takes a long time to melt, in the same way that another may believe that the sugar melted quickly.

Concrete time, or “what will flow on in the interval [between the points in space] — that is to say, real time —” (26) is *durée*, or time in the mind.

His widely known theory of these dual systems helped Bergson to become known as the first to “point the direction away from the calendar sense in fiction, with his theory of the fluid nature of reality and his emphasis on intuition rather than upon reason as a means of sensing its duration” (Kohler 16). Temps, abstract, or clock time can be defined as “the spatialized conception of time [Bergson] ascribes to science,” as is measured on scientific devices, whereas *durée*, concrete, or mind time,

is “lived, inner time” (Hasler 147) as experienced by the conscious being.<sup>9</sup> Like both Augustine and Nietzsche, Bergson believes that mind-time is non-spatial and subjective, and like Nietzsche, that “every present moment encloses the past and anticipates the future, and that memory charts the course of personality in the continuous stream of time. The Bergson view makes time a relative matter,” (Kohler 16) as time in the mind functions independently from clock-time.<sup>10</sup>

Bergson’s notion of *durée* can be applied to human consciousness:

“Bergson’s *durée*, or durational flux, is the inner reality of the personality flowing through time” (Lee 111). Here the notion of time and consciousness are blended through the senses. “Our moods and sensations are queer blendings of such elements as memories impinging upon and conditioning our present sensory impressions of confused sounds, smells, and sights, all forming themselves into highly fluid states of consciousness ever merging into one another” (Kumar 22). Bergson’s theory of duration, then, supports the notion of constructionism, as each person interprets time in his own way through memory and the senses. *Temps*, however, is Bergson’s true time, and is not subject to constructionism. It is “understood as an impenetrable and seamlessly continuous flux” (Goldman 61). It exists independently of human subjectivity, similar to Augustine’s notion of time as experienced by God, and stretches on forever.

---

<sup>9</sup> Some could argue that this is the essence of literature — books viewed as materialized moments of being last throughout time; they are void of past, present, or future.

<sup>10</sup> This supports the constructionist view of time that Woolf had adopted.

By whichever name is chosen, Bergson's theory seems to have had an effect on Woolf's writing (specifically in *Mrs. Dalloway*), though there is no hard evidence that Woolf personally read his work.<sup>11</sup> More than likely, Woolf was familiar with Bergson through her associations with other writers and philosophers.<sup>12</sup> Critics, such as Humphrey, support the notion that Bergson's work was both popular and widely known in Europe<sup>13</sup>, and that he effectively passed the torch to future philosophers and intellectuals: "William James and Henri Bergson convinced the following generations that consciousness flows like a stream and that the mind has its own time and space values apart from the arbitrary and set ones of the external world" (Humphrey 120). Bergson's conception of time became central to discussion of the subject as people widely accepted the notion that clock-time and mind-time were two distinct concepts.

The study of the concept of time also captured the scientific community. Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity combines philosophical notions of time with scientific theory relating to quantum physics and metaphysics. His Theory of Relativity deals specifically with the laws of the universe, and therefore, can be useful to the study of time and space as used in literature. Einstein's theory explores the many behaviors of light, specifically the relationship between particles and waves. Again, like Bergson's work, it is difficult to presume whether Woolf was personally

---

<sup>11</sup> There is no mention of Bergson in her diaries, and "the novelist herself denied actually having read Bergson" (Hasler 146), but they were contemporaries — "One might reply that Bergsonism was part of the intellectual atmosphere of the years from 1910 to 1912, as Einstein was to be in the years from 1919 to 1930" (Whitworth 147).

<sup>12</sup> Presumably Bertrand Russell, who knew Bergson's work and had adopted a constructionist view of time; he wrote, "the one all-embracing time is a construction, like the one all-embracing space" (Russell 154).

<sup>13</sup> Bergson won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1927, the same year that Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* was published.

familiar with Einstein's writing; however, many books had been published that explored different aspects of light waves, theories of time and space, and theories of the universe that relate directly to Einstein's own theory. "All were published in Britain, and many were reviewed in journals like the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Athenaeum* and *New Statesman*, at a time when Woolf was contributing to or was associated with them" (Whitworth 306). Like their ideas about Bergson, some critics suggest that even if Woolf's knowledge of relativity was limited, the zeitgeist (or 'spirit of the age,' as Woolf calls it in *Orlando*) is enough to take into consideration when studying her novels.

To fully understand Einstein's theory it is necessary to backtrack to Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion:

Everything from the orbiting planets to the falling apple is subject to the same law: the force of gravity. The universe is seen as logical, its laws remaining consistent no matter where or under what circumstances they are applied. The foundations of this commonsense world are space and time... In other words; space and time are absolute (Strathern 55-6).

Again we see a theory of absolute, true time that rests in Newton's belief in God. A major dilemma within Newton's system is that it rules out the effect of human consciousness on the world. Einstein claimed that he did not believe in God and had removed the God-concept from scientific equations, which allowed him to see that personal perspective has a greater effect on space and time than Newton ever considered possible. And Einstein was not alone; it became more common for

intellectuals to question Newton's Laws, as scientists such as Ernst Mach and mathematicians such as Jules Henri Poincare began casting doubt on Newtonian absolutist theory.

Einstein's theory accounted for the anomalies and inconsistencies contained in Newton's theories without threatening to throw the world into utter chaos. He discovered that when looking at light waves, they appeared as particles; but when looking at the particles, they appeared as waves. He then proposed a formula for the speed of light through space, regardless of the motion of the source of light or of the observer. This led to his declaration that all speed is relative, or in other words, depends on the point of view of its measurement. In his book entitled *Relativity: the Special and General Theory*, Einstein states:

Let us imagine a raven flying through the air in such a manner that its motion, as observed from the embankment, is uniform and in a straight line. If we were to observe the flying raven from the moving railway carriage, we should find that the motion of the raven would be one of different velocity and direction, but that it would still be uniform and in a straight line (Einstein 1).

In other words, though the raven appears to be slowly flying at a fifty-degree angle from one perspective, it can appear to be flying faster, at an eighty-degree angle from another. Einstein's theory, then, accounts for relativity, which is the notion that the observer's point of view can shift the definition of speed and motion in reference to time and space.

Einstein's scientific orientation is not sufficient reason to exclude his theories from literary examinations of the concept of time. His Theory of Relativity supports Woolf's notion of constructionism in that our perceptions of events have the power to change them (and in some cases, make them last as long as we'd like). Relativity can, therefore, be useful when examining Woolf's literature on the subjects of reality, consciousness, and the concept of time.

*It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impossible to conceive when there will be no time.*

—Thomas Paine

A concordance to Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, reveals her obsession with the subject of time. 'Death,' 'old,' and 'young' (relative to the aging process) are mentioned sixty-one, one hundred forty-eight, and sixty-one times, respectively; 'moment' seventy times, and 'time,' itself, ninety-two times. The only words mentioned more often than these are character names and 'said,' as in "Clarissa said," which is a necessary aspect of dialogue. The novel embraces a Bergsonian sense of time through the distinction Woolf makes between clock-time and mind-time, which directly correlates to Bergson's notion of temps and durée. As Hasler states, "in *Mrs. Dalloway* the main characters are almost uninterruptedly living in the *durée bergsonienne*, receptively, passively yielding to memories... prompted by all kinds of sense-stimuli" (Hasler 148). Few novels are more commonly studied alongside Bergson's theory of time than *Mrs. Dalloway*. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, time as referenced to this novel will assume a Bergsonian approach to the concept of time.

Woolf's novel takes place on a single day in June as the title character goes about London, running errands in preparation for an evening party. "Within this

space of time, by the seemingly casual contacts she makes and the associations and memories they evoke, the whole of Mrs. Dalloway's life is laid bare" (Kohler 19). This particular day is of little dramatic importance to the overall plot, but is an attempt to reveal an entire human existence in a compressed amount of time. As Humphrey points out, in addition to the single day on which the novel is set, "the time involved in the basic drama which takes place in the minds of these characters covers eighteen years; the place of incident varies from India to Bourton to London to the World War battlefields of France; and about a dozen characters are involved" (Humphrey 100). To achieve this effect even within the few hours that the novel encompasses, then (and here we are reminded of the working title, *The Hours*), time is slowed down, sped up, and allowed to remain in some contemporary view of the duration that certain lengths of time are believed to represent. "If time can be stretched out in this fashion to show the variety of human experience, it can also be pushed downward to reveal the depth and intensity of that experience" (Kohler 19). *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel that supports constructionism because Woolf is able to form the concept of time as she chooses to fit in the collective pasts of the characters.

Like Bergson, Woolf concentrates on a dual notion of the concept of time in *Mrs. Dalloway*. She draws the distinction between mind-time, often referred to through characters' memories, and clock-time through such devices as "the recurrent strokes of Big Ben, representing fictional time, and by the stream-of-consciousness techniques and images of fluidity, representing the character's psychological time" (Vieira 9). Thus Woolf not only uses the symbolism of the clock coupled with the

narrative technique associated with memory, but the novel's form also slows down and speeds up time to represent human consciousness.

Bergson's notion of temps, or clock-time, is "concerned only with the ends of the intervals [between points in space] and not with the intervals themselves" (*Creative Evolution* 12). The ends of these intervals are points as measured, for example, on a clock. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, what Bergson would consider "temps" is often explored through clock symbolism. "The symbols establish the connection between consciousness and natural time which, as Bergson says, has a parallel duration to ours" (Vieira 12). These symbols begin to reveal themselves within the first few pages; Big Ben strikes, and although the specific hour is not given, its impression is left solidly in the mind of the reader. When it arises in later passages, the reader is reminded of the impact that striking clocks have on the main character:

For having lived in Westminster — how many years now? over twenty, — one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air (*Mrs. Dalloway* 4).

In this short passage we have learned a great deal about Clarissa Dalloway — she has lived in Westminster for over twenty years, she has been ill, and she has a definite reaction to the passage of time, whether she is preoccupied by the hustle of city traffic or whether she has just awoken. To Clarissa, recognition of time passage is intuitive,

“as if she had a piece of the clock mechanism inside her own head. She feels the nearness of the hour as if it had the power to ‘pause’ the flux of her life” (Vieira 10). Her reaction to time passage, however, is more complex.

The language of this passage, carefully chosen by Woolf, reveals something of Clarissa’s internal polarity, which stands not only for the polarity of time itself, but that contained within her awareness of its passing. The language used to describe the literal sound that the clock makes reveals some important information specifically to the nature of Clarissa’s character. First Big Ben is ‘musical,’ then ‘irrevocable.’ The duality of the clock’s sound gives the reader an insight into the duality within Clarissa’s own mind. Similarly, words such as ‘suspense,’ ‘strikes,’ ‘boomed,’ and ‘warning’ are connected to connotations of fear and power, extracting from the reader a negative response to the passing time. However, these particular words coupled with ‘positive,’ ‘hush,’ ‘musical,’ and ‘dissolved,’ suggest just the opposite, and elicit a quiet, peaceful, and positive response from the reader. All of this language lets the reader know that Clarissa has a certain sense of the contradictory nature of time within her. By creating opposing reactions to the passage of time, Woolf subtextually suggests a Bergsonian duality to the nature of time.

The description of the clock serves a tertiary purpose. “The clock punctuates the unmarked flow of time. It warns man against the one-way direction of the chronological time” (Vieira 10). This passage is the first strong similarity in the

novel to Bergson's theory of duration.<sup>14</sup> Bergson drew a distinction between temps and durée, but does not suggest (like Nietzsche does) that time can go back and be repaired. He states: "our duration is irreversible. We could not live over again a single moment, for we should have to begin by effacing the memory of all that had followed" (*Creative Evolution* 8). In the Bergsonian view, time is a continuous flux, a constant stream moving forward. There is little doubt that Clarissa understands this idea (even though Woolf's knowledge of Bergson is questionable), as she draws her attention to the irrevocable nature of Big Ben's strokes.

The presence of the chiming clocks — Big Ben, St. Margaret's, and Harley Street — are necessary to the framework of the novel because they set the overall fictional pace. The presence of unconventional time measurement — of Mrs. Dalloway's slow recollections of her past, her impressions of the present, and her anticipations of the future — are just as necessary as the symbols of clock-time because the distinction between the two "reminds us of the contrast between the external, quantitative time, and the inner, qualitative time" (Hasler 149). This contrast is vital because it is what allows Woolf to accomplish the revelation of the entire being that is Clarissa Dalloway within the confines of one narrative day. Woolf is aware that the nature of time is sometimes revealed in other forms than upon landmark timepieces:

---

<sup>14</sup> Einstein's Relativity theory, too, is evoked here — the time it takes for the bells to complete their ringing differs depending on who hears them. "If the person in question is deeply engaged in his *memoire involontaire*, then the flow of thoughts and visions fills even the intervals between the individual strokes, and later, when the reader has dismissed the chimes as having died away by now, he is suddenly reminded that the vibrations are still reverberating '(The leaden circles dissolved in the air)' (Hasler 149).

An inescapable concomitant of [Bergson's] *durée* is... the inadequacy of the clock as a time-measurer. The clock divides the flow of time in parts, while man's 'inner' or 'psychic' time is not perceived as a chain, a succession of separable units of thought, but as a continuous, uninterrupted flux (Hasler 147).

Therefore, memory must play a part in the characters' evolution. "Time appears on various levels as the different characters in turn recall the past or look toward the future, and often the only unifying element among these people is the moment of time which brings them together" (Kohler 23). To accomplish this, Woolf couples a symbol of passing time with a shifting point of view to denote that passing time and to serve as a unifying element for her characters in time and space. As Septimus Smith, the war-torn madman, and his wife, Rezia, sit in the park, each separately contemplating their individual misery and the end of their marriage, their scene is connected to passerby Peter Walsh's (Clarissa's former suitor) stream of consciousness by the striking of the clock. Peter is so disconnected from these characters that he misinterprets their situation, mistakenly describing the scene as a lovers' squabble. By using the clock here, Woolf denotes "both the hours of an actual day and the shift from one figure to another and the consequent change in her system of time" (Kohler 23). The chiming clock is responsible for not only reminding readers of the narrative time and Woolf's shifting 'system of time,' but also for connecting the transitional dialogue in this section and its otherwise unconnected characters.

Woolf uses other objects, such as a motorcar or an airplane, to accomplish the same goal (a similar practice as is utilized in *The Waves*). Clarissa, Miss Pym the florist, Edgar J. Watkiss, Septimus and Rezia Smith, and even unnamed characters such as “old ladies on the tops of omnibuses” and “boys on bicycles” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 15) are connected through a brief experience — the movement of a motorcar through London traffic — that lasts for “thirty seconds” (17) clock-time; seven pages psychological-time. After all, it is not “the hours of the day that give the novel its coherent structure, but rather the way in which, in the evening, all the various threads are drawn together at Clarissa’s party” (Hasler 148). Repeated phrases, landmarks, and psychological conditions are the threads that perform similar functions as clocks in the narrative. This is not to say that the clocks do not serve as important symbols; rather, it is not necessary to use only an obvious symbol of time passage, such as Big Ben or the chimes of St. Margaret’s, to connect characters in space and time.

Woolf also draws reference to the three stages of time (past, present and future) in this section of *Mrs. Dalloway*. As the motorcar “proceeded towards Picadilly” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 16), Clarissa notes the difficulty of identifying the mystery passenger. “The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute” (16). How, then, can proof of his/her identity be realized?

Greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand’s-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of

the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known (16).

This section draws attention to future historians sifting through what, to Clarissa, is the present moment. Here Clarissa has an unconventional awareness of the past, present and future. The present is the motorcar driving along London's streets. The future is when all those watching will be little more than bones. But here the past exists only in the future. The past will be when historians know who it is in the car — the future past is Clarissa's present. She understands that "this Wednesday morning" will eventually be the past, but as this is her present, she cannot yet describe it as the past except in reference to the future.

Examples of Bergson's distinction between mind-time and clock-time abound in the text. The first hour of Clarissa's day "takes up almost a quarter of the whole novel" (Hasler 149), while the novel's entire duration encompasses approximately sixteen hours. Psychological-time and clock-time are not entirely aligned throughout the piece. Clarissa's talk with Peter Walsh begins at eleven o'clock in the morning and ends as the clock is chiming the half-hour, yet their conversation, which exists mostly in their own thoughts, goes on for nine pages. When Peter is introduced to Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, we note that "[t]he sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour stuck between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong,

indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that” (48). Woolf notes that it is eleven-thirty in the morning, to be precise, as she makes certain to drop exact times and locations in relation to the clocks to suggest a certain importance to their presence.

As Big Ben begins to strike, Peter leaves the house. He is now alone with his thoughts. It is at this point that Peter’s stream of consciousness narrative follows for an entire page, during which the phrase that is to be repeated several times in the text, “the leaden circles dissolved in the air,” recurs, creating a connection with its earlier reference. While readers have become engrossed in Peter’s mind-time, they have forgotten that the chimes are still reverberating. Parenthetically inserted in the text is a reminder that: “(Still the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him; the half-hour; still early; only half-past eleven still)” (49). Again, this is a reminder that clock-time and narrative-time (here, Peter’s mind-time) are different notions. Peter goes through an entire inner dialogue with himself on the state of his life, his feelings on love, his inventions, and his annoyance with Clarissa, among other topics, while the clocks continue to chime the half hour. Further, even reading the passage takes more time than it would take the clock to sound its bells. Peter Walsh’s stream-of-consciousness<sup>15</sup> narrative goes on recalling memories (many of

---

<sup>15</sup> Stream-of-consciousness compliments the argument for Bergson’s duration in which “life is in a perpetual flux where nothing is lost, but everything gets larger and larger. Thus, every becoming is co-determined by what there is, and time which flows continuously is unitary at any moment... there are no relatively uniform states of consciousness which follow each other as do the moments in the spatialized time of science. In duration there is only one fluid stream in which there is no clear division or separation and in which everything is kept at the same time ” (Vieira 11). Therefore, stream-of-consciousness is the literary device that allows thoughts, which, in many instances of

which correlate to his perspective on time and reference specific lengths of time). These memories instruct the reader on how much in love with Clarissa he once was (“He had never felt so happy in the whole of his life! Without a word they made it up. They walked down to the lake. He had twenty minutes of perfect happiness” (62)); the falling out between he and Clarissa (“And when she said, ‘It’s no use. It’s no use. This is the end’ — after he had spoken for hours, it seemed, with the tears running down his cheeks — it was if she had hit him in the face” (64)); his love for Daisy in India (who comes from a “respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent” (55)); and end when he stops to take a brief nap.

Again, Woolf associates a negative connotation to the clock. As Peter reflects on Clarissa’s illness, the weakness of her heart, and his happiness at the sound of the clock striking, he thinks, “It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing room” (50). It seems as if Woolf suggests (as she does with Septimus later on in the novel) that the clock is a looming reminder of the dangers of following clock-time. Yet, this metaphor is quickly turned around in the following sentences: “No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future” (50). The end of this passage challenges the common critical approach to the death metaphor when associating *Mrs. Dalloway*’s characters with clocks. Peter forcibly

---

Woolf’s literature are representative of time, to continuously grow into something larger, similar to aspects of time itself.

revolts against the implication of time as inescapable and can view his existence in the “*durée Bergsonienne*,” in which clock-time has little influence.

No reference to specific clock-time is given until twenty-two pages after its previous mention, when the narrative focus has switched to Septimus and Rezia, who have had their own episode in the meantime. From Septimus we learn exactly how much clock-time has passed since Peter left Clarissa’s house and all of this information has been given to the reader: “‘I will tell you the time,’ said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck — the quarter to twelve” (70). In fifteen short minutes, then, we have learned the whole of Clarissa’s history with Peter, his joy at being in love with a young girl from India, and a bit about Septimus’ disorder, all including time for a catnap. Here it must be remembered that “everything that enters consciousness is there at the ‘present moment’; furthermore, the event of this ‘moment,’ no matter how much clock time it occupies, may be infinitely extended by being broken up into its parts, or it may be highly compressed into a flash of recognition” (Humphrey 43). This accounts for Woolf’s ability to stretch fifteen minutes into twenty-two pages, and is another example of the dissonance between mind-time and clock-time in this narrative.

Other theories are not entirely left out, however. We can see remnants of Einstein in this narrative as well. As the onlookers attempt to figure out what the aeroplane’s smoke is spelling in the sky, there is some debate over its message. Some see “Glaxo,” some “Kreemo” (and as this is happening, again there is a reminder

from the clocks that it is eleven o'clock). Here the onlookers have difficulty figuring out the message because time is working against them. The letters fade quickly:

“Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps” (20). Because of their perspective, Mrs. Coates sees “Glaxo,” Mrs. Bletchley sees “Kreemo,” and Clarissa cannot determine the difference between a K, an E, or a Y. Of course, it cannot be writing all of these things, just as Einstein’s raven cannot be flying in two different directions at once.

Relativity is found in many places in the narrative. Peter thinks, “I haven’t felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was, and feeling like a child who runs out of doors” (52). Early in the novel, Clarissa:

felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day (8).

Later, as she recalls her youth at the lake with Peter, Clarissa thinks, “she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms” (43). Readers cannot help but be reminded of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity as Clarissa’s perspective in

these passages suggest her dual age. She is simultaneously young and old, inside and outside, in London and out to sea. For Clarissa, one day holds both the possibility for everything and the danger for nothing. Yet the narrative also resonates with a Bergsonian tone:

All this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ends absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling to all bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best (9).

Clarissa's belief in her continuity reflects a Bergsonian view of the world. She does not fully believe that life ends abruptly; rather she is "positive" that she lives on in the trees, in other people, in all her surroundings. This view is the one that makes the notion of death more consoling, for it suggests that the end is not so absolute. It brings us back to the idea of time as a construction — here it is not that Clarissa's body can physically outlast the ages, but that there is a certain timelessness to our existence, as we can live on through nature, our immediate surroundings, and other people as well.

In some passages Woolf's language suggests an "extreme sensitivity or vulnerability with regard to external time" (Hasler 149), as in the following passage: "Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled

at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion” (102). There is a connection between the oppressive nature of the clock and the Harley Street doctors that Septimus is taken to later on in the novel. The doctors themselves (interestingly, ‘Bradshaw,’ the name of one of these doctors, was at the time of *Mrs. Dalloway*’s composition a “household name as the authoritative railway timetable for Great Britain” (Hasler 150))<sup>16</sup> are the “allies of the ‘clocks of Harley Street,’ they symbolize the tyranny of external time, an artifice of the intellect, over the inner life” (Hasler 149). There is also a connection being made specifically between Clarissa and Septimus. Like the effect of these clocks upon Clarissa, the doctors ‘shred’ and ‘slice’ at Septimus until he chooses to take his own life, symbolically suggesting that clock-time, a construct of society, is detrimental to intellectual prosperity.

Time is a subject of great and continual importance to Septimus, who ruminates:

All of this, calm and reasonable as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.

‘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, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach them to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time (69-70).

---

<sup>16</sup> The standardization of time, for the purposes of mass transportation systems, “were fixed and agreed in the International Conference on Time in 1912” (Rodrigues 20).

Here there is a significant reference to Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in which the subjects of the poem are forever frozen in time before their first kiss. The poem itself is, in fact, an 'ode to Time.' Like Keats' characters, Septimus is frozen in the time of battle; he forever sees and hears his fellow soldiers who have died, and being frozen has driven him mad, locking him in a state of perpetual past.

"The tense of fiction is the past... the very pastness of the past has always appealed to the human imagination because it encloses in its perspectives of time the mysteries and the beginnings of things and life and death" (Kohler 17). Yet, as William Faulkner believed, even the past is not yet past. This idea is reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Clarissa's aunt, someone who is "assumed to be dead and gone" (Howard xii), arrives at the party. Her presence is symbolic of our links to the past — connections that we feel between present time and time gone by — and provokes discussion of the future. The aunt's presence may be a bit of a narrative joke on Woolf's part, but it is mentioned mere pages after a contemplative Bergsonian passage:

It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her skepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death... perhaps — perhaps (153).

Clarissa's thought here is that existence may have the possibility to go on after death — in other words, human life has within it the potential for duration, similar to Bergson's notion of 'durée.' Yet, again, this is coupled with typical modern polarity. Earlier passages suggest that death is certainly the end: "Did it matter then... that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely" (9), or "After that, how unbelievable death was! — that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all..." (122). Clarissa is, by nature, a skeptic, who therefore has such a difficult time accepting her own revelation that she finalizes her vision with a brooding "perhaps." It is not only the continuity of existence after death, then, but also the continuation of life itself (similar to the aunt who has continued living although people assume she is gone) that Clarissa questions here. Coupling these narrative instances reveals an important modern question that parallels Bergson's work: What reason do we have *not* to believe that our lives (though perhaps in the form of a ghost) will continue indeterminately?

*Time has no divisions to mark its passage; there is never a thunderstorm or blare of trumpets to announce the beginning of a new month or year. Even when a new century begins, it is only we mortals who ring bells and fire off pistols.*

—Thomas Mann

One response to the indeterminate continuation of life is suggested in Woolf's fifth novel, *Orlando* — here human life takes on the ability to continue for centuries. It is a novel of history, in which the poet Nick Greene states: “We must cherish the past; honour those writers — there are still a few left of ‘em — who take antiquity for their model and write, not for pay but —” (*Orlando* 278). The novel “traces in straightforward biographical fashion the life of a hero who is sixteen years old in Queen Elizabeth’s time, changes his sex at the age of thirty under Charles II, and ends as a woman of thirty-six on the stroke of midnight on the eleventh of October, 1928” (Kohler 21), the final date being the date of publication — the most present moment as could have been recorded. Orlando, along with other characters whom “enjoy fantastic longevity” (Dick 64) (such as Mrs. Grimsditch and the poet Nick Greene), somehow is able to outlast centuries, witnessing great changes in many areas of his/her society and personal life.

This is the most succinct summary of the novel (which approaches a great number of difficult philosophical questions) that can be given. *Orlando* is the least critically regarded novel in Woolf's body of work, but “is in some ways her most

successful experiment in fiction” (Kohler 21). Often, postmodern criticism leaves *Orlando* entirely out of the discussion of Woolf’s work, as if it were not important enough for serious study, or because it is viewed as an extended love letter to Vita Sackville-West. However, Woolf’s experimentation with the notion of time and human consciousness in this novel is far from negligible. “In her handling of background there is always an awareness of primitive or historical past... England rather than time gives the novel its underlying theme, but Mrs. Woolf presents the land itself against the greater background of its history” (Kohler 24). *Orlando* explores the notion of time through several methods, theories, and ideas that suggest yet another explanation for the nature of time than was offered in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

There is some validity to the argument that *Orlando* was born out of Woolf’s relationship with Sackville-West. In her journal, she notes her impression of Knole, Vita’s family estate: “All the centuries seemed lit up, the past expressive, articulate; not dumb & forgotten; but a crowd of people stood behind, not dead at all; not remarkable; fair faced, long limbed; affable; & so we reach the days of Elizabeth quite easily” (*Diary* 3: 125). In the novel, we see similar attention to persons and places within Orlando him/herself. But, notably, Orlando’s “longevity may have been suggested by a previously ignored passage in Sackville-West’s *Knole and the Sackvilles*,” in which she states upon reflection of a portrait hanging in the hall, “she must have been a truly legendary figure in the country by the time she had reached the age of a hundred and forty or thereabouts” (McNeer 5). But within Orlando’s character, Woolf branched out and created someone who could succeed the reigns of

many Kings and Queens, many centuries, many technological shifts, and many notions of the study of time.

There are glaring parallels to a Bergsonian concept of time in *Orlando* as can be seen in the following passage:

But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation (98).

The beginning of this passage is reminiscent of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, of the circular connection between the body of time and the mind of man. However, again the notion of clock time versus mind time arises, and effectively overshadows any reference to Nietzsche with one, instead, to Bergson. Similar to his notions of *temps* and *durée*, Orlando's biographer says here that time (both clock and mind time), as we understand it, is not always accurate in its representation. Here, "Woolf makes clear that the comforting objectivity and regularity of historical and clock time are almost irrelevant in view of the individual's greater dependence upon his subjective sense of time" (German 36). Though this may once more suggest the association

between Woolf and Bergson, instead the continuation of this passage leads directly into Einstein's theory of Relativity.

“When a man has reached the age of thirty, as Orlando now had, time when he is thinking becomes inordinately long; time when he is doing becomes inordinately short” (98). In essence, the notion of Relativity is based on three major premises — how we judge the value of time based on our experience, our interpretation of events, and our preferences, not because there is a predetermined (or God-ordained) truth to time's duration.<sup>17</sup> Woolf's passage is similar to a direct quote from Einstein in explanation of Relativity: “When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes. When you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That's relativity” (Tenny 1). But this is not a purely Einsteinian revelation; Emerson wrote something similar<sup>18</sup>:

The soul circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner, it abolishes time and space. The influence of the senses has, in most men, overpowered the mind to that degree, that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits, is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul. The spirit sports with time — can

---

<sup>17</sup> Hence, the differing calendars that have been used throughout history, some of which are still being used today: for example, the Roman, Egyptian, Phoenician, Chinese, and Gregorian calendars. Interestingly, the Cotsworth calendar, which consists of thirteen equal months of twenty-eight days (the 13<sup>th</sup> being named “Tricember”), was the preference of George Eastman, who proposed the Cotsworth calendar reform for business purposes in the Eastman Kodak Company in 1926, and used it until the mid-1980s (Eastman 1).

<sup>18</sup> As did Milton in *Paradise Lost*: “The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n” (Milton, 254-5).

crowd eternity into an hour, or stretch an hour to eternity. We are often made to feel that there is another youth and age than that which is measured from the year of our natural births (Emerson 162).

Again, it is hard to say whether Woolf was familiar with Emerson's essay,<sup>19</sup> though the last sentence strongly parallels the foundation of *Orlando*. However, the essence of Emerson's passage also parallels Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which, as previously stated, Woolf may have had some exposure to.

What is important here is that both Einstein and Emerson suggest an idea that runs thick through *Orlando* — we have the power to define the duration of certain events or experiences in our lives, and, as Woolf strongly suggests, perhaps the length of our lives as well. As Orlando's biographer states in chapter six:

And indeed, it cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronise the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them in the tombstone. Of the rest, some we know to be dead, though they walk among us; some are not yet born, though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. The true length of a person's life, whatever the

---

<sup>19</sup> However, it has been noted that Nietzsche always carried a copy of Emerson's essays in his coat pocket.

*Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute (305-6).

This passage not only pokes fun at Leslie Stephen (Woolf's father and editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*), it suggests what many philosophers and scientists had theorized — the length of a human life, and therefore time, is indeterminate.

Those who synchronize their internal time will live out their average life expectancy. Those who live each internal time separately, as Orlando successfully accomplishes, can stretch their life through hundreds of years.

Similarly, Woolf uses the appearance of architectural structures to signify the changing “spirit of the age” (236). To Orlando, in the sixteenth century “the Abbey windows were lit up and burnt like a heavenly, many-coloured shield (in Orlando's fancy); now all the west seemed a golden window with troops of angels (in Orlando's fancy again) passing up and down the heavenly stairs perpetually” (53). Orlando sees the structures this way *in his fancy* because to him — therefore, subjectively — they are reflections of the attitudes and perceptions of the age. Later, however, the same buildings appear differently to Orlando. As the sun fades (or, in other words, as time passes) the buildings change: “Of St. Paul's, in particular, nothing was left but a gilt cross. The Abbey appeared like the grey skeleton of a leaf. Everything suffered emaciation and transformation” (55). Later still, when the centuries change:

Orlando then for the first time noticed a small cloud gathered behind the dome of St. Paul's. As the stroke sounded, the cloud increased, and she saw it darken and spread with extraordinary speed... All was dark; all was doubt; all

was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun (225-6).

Woolf's suggestion here is that drastic changes to social dynamics were taking place all around her with the passage of time — it could easily become overwhelming, and it is easy to see how one's opinion regarding these new introductions to the London lifestyle could sway.

In a review of Lewis Carroll's complete works (*Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass* being a classic example of the space-time continuum), Woolf states that Carroll's achievement is not a great work for children, but rather in that he makes adult readers become children. However, in order to do so, "he first makes us asleep. 'Down, down, down, would the fall *never* come to an end?' Down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches, then contracts" (*The Moment* 82). Echoes of this review are found repeatedly throughout this section in chapter two of *Orlando*:

It would be no exaggeration to say that he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least. Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most.

Altogether, the task of estimating the length of human life (of the animals' we presume not to speak) is beyond our capacity, for directly we say that it is ages long, we are reminded that it is briefer than the fall of a rose leaf to the ground (99).

Or:

Life seemed to him of prodigious length. Yet even so, it went like a flash. But even when it stretched longest and the moments swelled biggest and he seemed to wander alone in deserts of vast eternity, there was no time for the smoothing out and deciphering of those thickly scored parchments which thirty years among men and women had rolled tight in his heart and brain (100).

Like Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and contrary to the beliefs of many reviewers of this book, *Orlando* is a novel not simply about history, but one about psychological history — about the way people think rather than what actually happens, and about how their perceptions (here, the perception of time) shape their experiences. “English history is given to us in terms of the quality of life enjoyed by the people rather than in the sensational events which provide dates to remember” (Alexander 128).

Orlando's experiences are viewed through his/her perceptions of time. He feels as if he has aged a century in a day, and here he not only has the capability to do so, but in fact does.

When Orlando goes to stay with the Gipsies, tension arises upon discussion of ancestry (or, in other words, the past). Orlando, a member of English culture, has a hard time acclimating to the Gipsies' way of life because of the strong differences between their histories and their notions of what ancestry means. “At first she tried to account for it by saying that she came of an ancient and civilized race, whereas these gipsies were an ignorant people, not much better than savages” (147). She tells them

of her large house, her three hundred sixty-five bedrooms, and her “four or five hundred years” (147) of family lineage. Here the Gipsies become visibly uneasy, and it becomes clear to Orlando that:

Rustum and the other gipsies thought a descent of four or five hundred years only the meanest possible. Their own families went back at least two or three thousand years. To the gipsy whose ancestors had built the Pyramids centuries before Christ was born, the genealogy of Howards and Plantagenets was no better and no worse than that of the Smiths and Joneses: both were negligible. Moreover, where the shepherd boy had a lineage of such antiquity, there was nothing specially memorable or desirable in ancient birth; vagabonds and beggars all shared it (147-8).

In addition, the gipsy feels that the notion of building hundreds of bedrooms when the whole earth is there for everyone is a “vulgar ambition” (148). Again, the differing perspectives of Orlando and the gipsy are based on their differing experience, interpretation of events, and preferences, which is the essence of Einstein’s Relativity. To strengthen the point, the biographer states:

Looked at from the gipsy point of view, a Duke, Orlando understood, was nothing but a profiteer or robber who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than to build three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms when one was enough, and none was even better than one (148).

The Gipsy's opinion of the Duke is not far off from the Duke's opinion of the Gipsy. It is little more than perspective that defines their position upon the other. Therefore, 'relatively speaking,' this passage highlights Einstein's influence upon Woolf.

We again see the influence of Einstein during the game of Fly Loo between Orlando and the Archduke. Orlando has tired of the Archduke's advances and has become determined to find some way to enjoy herself during his visits. The game consists of watching blue bottle flies hovering in the room, putting out three lumps of sugar, and betting upon which lump the flies will land on. As the game itself has become tiresome, too, Orlando turns to cheating. "She caught a blue bottle, gently pressed the life out of it (it was half dead already, or her kindness for the dumb creatures would not have permitted it) and secured it by a drop of gum Arabic to a lump of sugar" (182). In this way, Orlando succeeds in cheating the Archduke out of 17,250 pounds. Relativity enters in when the biographer reveals that the Archduke was "no nice judge of flies. A dead fly looked to him much the same as a living one" (183). Through her deception, Orlando not only is doing for the fly precisely what has been done to her (the extension of life, as the Archduke believes it to be alive), but she also has created her own experiment in Relativity. Orlando's experience (she knows the fly is dead because she was responsible for killing it), interpretation of events (again, her knowledge of the fly's death), and preferences (to have a little fun with the wearisome experience of spending time with the Archduke) lead her to believe that the fly is dead. But we can also see the basis of Relativity within the Archduke's character. Because of his experience (his poor judge of the appearance of

flies), his interpretation of events (he has no cause to believe that Orlando would cheat), and his preferences (she was welcome to his fortune, he simply wanted to spend time with her), he believes that the fly is alive.

But Relativity is sometimes overshadowed by the treatment of passing time. Interestingly, each reference to a major shift in Orlando's life is punctuated by the number twelve, the word 'dozen,' or the mention of midnight, sometimes used in combination. When Orlando plans to run off with Sasha, for example, they plan to meet at midnight. Of course, she stands him up, and it begins to rain (melting the Great Frost — here there is not only a significant transformation within Orlando himself, but also to his immediate natural surroundings). The raindrops fell "a dozen times", soon becoming "sixty", then "six hundred" (59). It is at the stroke of midnight that Orlando "knew his doom was sealed" (60). The rain is used as a symbol of time, hence all the references to exact measures of clock-time. References to numbers that signify periods of time abound elsewhere in the text as well. For example, there are three hundred sixty-five bedrooms (one for each day of the year) and fifty-two staircases (one for each week in one year) in Orlando's house. In addition, each time Orlando goes into his deep slumber, which always follows a traumatic event, he sleeps for exactly seven days — one perfect week — and wakes as if nothing had happened (symbolizing his rebirth).

It is nearly impossible to flip two consecutive pages in this novel and not find some reference either to an exact date, a clock, or to some regulated increment of time. "Time as measured by clock and calendar is kept in the foreground of *Orlando*,

but this is done in a way that tends to mock such chronological verisimilitude” (Dick 64). Exact dates permeate the text, such as “One June morning — it was Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> —” (66), “the first of November, 1927” (78), “Thursday, May the 10<sup>th</sup>” (133), and finally, on the last page, Woolf reveals the most exact moment possible, “the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty Eight” (329). This technique both reminds readers that this story does follow some chronology, (as it is, after all, a biography), and serves to reference clock-time, as that is the way that people have learned to function in the world.

Exact numbers are also given a great deal of prominence in *Orlando*. The number ‘three’ arises repeatedly throughout the text. This particular number historically holds some sort of mystical quality. For example, there are three witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*; in Christianity we see the holy trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; in Ancient Greece there are three Fates and three Graces; in fairy tales we find three little pigs, Goldilocks’ three bears; scientifically speaking there are three phases of matter (solid, liquid, gas); in the study of Logic the three possible answers are yes, no, and maybe; in Psychoanalysis we find Freud’s Ego, Superego, and the Id; and when we deal with the notion of time, of course, we find past, present, and future. This not only supplies the text with a certain rhythm, but also suggests a pattern that is historically based. In *Orlando* the repetition of the number three, in “Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods who keep watch and ward by the inkpot of the biographer” (134) and their cry of “Truth! And again they cry Truth! And sounding yet a third time in concert they peal forth, The Truth

and nothing but the Truth” (134), Purity, Chastity, and Modesty, who turn Orlando into a woman (134-6) and their cry of “Hide! Hide! Hide!” (136), and “Love, Friendship, Poetry,” which make Orlando “long, as she had never longed before, for pen and ink” (145), in addition to less significant references, such as the “three months and more” (61) that the Great Frost lasts, a “three-masted sailing ship” (161), “three major suits” (168) brought upon Orlando in her absence, “three lumps of sugar” (181) used in Orlando and the Archduke’s game of Fly Loo, “three honeyed words dropped into her ear on the deck of the *Enamored Lady*” (197), the “three hours” (199) Orlando remains at Countess R’s party, the “three witty things” (200) that Countess R has ever said, and the three sayings that the mystery guest at the party reveals (here the biographer leaves out the sayings themselves, claiming that “One such saying was bad enough; but three, one after another, on the same evening! No society could survive it” (202)), leave the reader bombarded with this particular number, strongly suggesting its significance both in and outside of the text. If we recall its significance in reference to time, which makes sense considering that this number remains throughout the centuries (not only within this particular novel, but throughout real history as well), we are, by implication, brought back to the base of past, present, and future, which is, in essence, what *Orlando* is an exploration of.

But even with this attention to exact dates and numbers, Woolf finds a way to poke fun at the form of biography and its attention to such detail:

It was now November. After November comes December. Then January, February, March, and April. After April comes May. June, July, August

follow. Next is September. Then October, and so, behold, here we are back at November again, with a whole year accomplished.

This method of writing biography, though it has its merits, is a little bare, perhaps, and the reader, if we go on with it, may complain that he could recite the calendar for himself and so save his pocket whatever the sum the publisher may think proper to charge for this book. But what can the biographer do when his subject has put him in the predicament in which Orlando has now put us (266-7)?

Biographers have the task of capturing an entire life in several hundred pages.

In doing so, certain details must be skipped. Woolf is aware, then, of the biographer's (and, also, the reader's) challenge with Orlando's life span. Of what importance can one year out of nearly four centuries be? Skimming over one year in this fashion, then, allows Woolf to have a bit of fun while commenting on the nature of biography.

Clocks are handled in different ways throughout the text. The first reference to a clock is when Orlando is rushing to bring Queen Elizabeth her bowl of rose water, and he is late. He dresses as quickly as he can; in fact "in less than ten minutes by the stable clock. He was ready. He was flushed. He was excited. But he was terribly late" (21). Here the clock elicits different emotions. The clock has caused Orlando to rush, which raises his anxiety. It has caused his temperature to rise. It has also caused him to be "overcome with shyness" (22) at his lateness. Later the clock is cause for excitement as Orlando awaits Sasha's arrival. He plans their midnight

meeting “with a rush of passion” (57), and again is faced with anxiety when he waits for midnight to arrive. For what should be a happy occasion for Orlando, signified by the clock, suddenly becomes a traumatic event that will launch him into slumber:

Suddenly, with an awful and ominous voice, a voice full of horror and alarm which raised every hair of anguish in Orlando’s soul, St. Paul’s struck the first stroke of midnight. Four times more it struck remorselessly. With the superstition of a lover, Orlando made it out that it was on the sixth stroke that she would come. But the sixth stroke echoed away, and the seventh came and the eighth, and to his apprehensive mind they seemed notes first heralding and then proclaiming death and disaster. When the twelfth struck he knew that his doom was sealed (60).

This is reminiscent of the duality of the clocks in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in that they have the power to elicit multiple responses from both the character and the reader. And again, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, there are references to multiple clocks as well. “Other clocks struck, jangling one after another. The whole world seemed to ring with the news of her deceit and his derision. The old suspicions subterraneously at work in him rushed forth from concealment openly. He was bitten by a swarm of snakes, each more poisonous than the last” (61). The swarm of snakes is these “other clocks,” reminding him of all the negative feelings that he has, all of Sasha’s deceptions, and they ring out for the entire world to hear.

Unlike *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is enveloped in surrounding reminders of clock-time, Orlando’s character is not always in such settings. When she is with the

Gipsies, for example, there are no booming chimes, wristwatches, teatimes, or any other such obvious reminders. Here, she spends her time doing chores:

She milked the goats; she collected brushwood; she stole a hen's egg now and then, but always put a coin or a pearl in place of it; she herded cattle; she stripped vines; she trod the grape; she filled the goat-skin and drank from it; and when she remembered how, at about this time of day, she should have been making the motions of drinking and smoking over an empty coffee cup and a pipe which lacked tobacco, she laughed aloud, cut herself another hunch of bread, and begged for another puff from old Rustum's pipe, filled though it was with cow dung (141).

When she is with the Gipsies, Orlando needs no clocks, because she has constructed her own notions of time in relation to her activities. She reflects on the world in reference to how things appear and what she does at different times of the day, but the reference is not to five o'clock or teatime; instead the references are to "evening" (142), the "campfire" (142), the sunset "blazing over the Thessalian hills" (142), or simply "it was night; the mountains rose above them" (148). When she is away from the rigid, formal, English society, time becomes something that can be constructed in a different manner.

Of the critics that choose to deal with this novel, most sing its praises. Some state, "Mrs. Woolf is able, despite her use of fantasy and farce, to depict the distinctive qualities of four centuries of English history and to examine the effects of the individual ages upon literature, human nature, and the relationship between the

sexes” (German 35).<sup>20</sup> Others claim, “No novel is more saturated with detail to show the changes brought about by the passing of time” (Kohler 18). These details are usually confined to physical changes. Attention to styles of clothing (“Orlando had now washed, and dressed herself in those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex” (139)) and technological advances abound (““Look at that!” she exclaimed, some days later when an absurd truncated carriage without any horses began to glide about of its own accord. A carriage without any horses indeed” (296)), but the changes to Orlando’s surroundings are also often highlighted.

The Great Frost, for example, serves for an interesting way to deal with the passage of time. The biographer informs the reader that the Great Frost “was, historians tell us, the most severe that has ever visited these islands” (33), and what is the biographer him/herself, other than a historian? We are made to feel that we can trust this source for the following information. Like Keats’ Grecian Urn, which is referenced several times throughout the text, everything is frozen in time. Birds, a young countrywoman, shepherds, ploughmen, teams of horses, in fact “It was no uncommon sight to come upon a whole herd of swine frozen immovable upon the road” (34). Woolf does not leave out the eternal question, however — “Shoals of eels lay motionless in a trance, but whether their state was one of death or merely of suspended animation which the warmth would revive puzzled the philosophers” (36).

---

<sup>20</sup> Evidence of this can be found in many instances throughout the novel — Orlando’s opinion of marriage, serving tea, and the discomfort in woman’s clothing once she has changed genders, as well as the changes to his character that were supposed to take place during the transformation (“Chastity, Purity, and Modesty” (138) to name a few).

“The confrontation of the two kinds of time is thus intimately connected with the major contrast in Virginia Woolf’s fiction — surface reality versus inner life, analysis versus intuition, masculine versus feminine principle — reconciled in the androgynous ideal of *Orlando*” (Hasler 152). This is, in essence, the big question when it comes to the study of time in *Orlando*. Does time (or human life) abruptly come to an end, or does it continue on in a state of suspended animation? Woolf’s answer in this novel can only be that it has the capability to continue on, as Orlando’s character is able to outlast centuries, witnessing changes in government, changes to buildings, changes in technology, and even so much as a change in gender.

*Nietzsche had this idea of eternal recurrence. That means we live the same life over and over again exactly the same way. Great. That means I have to relive the Ice Capades. Not worth it.*

—Woody Allen, *Hannah and her Sisters*

*The Waves* combines elements of both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando* through an original form that utilizes techniques of poetry, prose, and drama. “However, this third novel keeps the main trait of the previous ones. It presents a temporal dichotomy as its main structural device, though this dichotomy is displayed more as a parallel than as an opposition. Thus, Woolf manages to create novels so diverse in their structure as a whole and yet so closely linked in their temporal aspect” (Vieira 16). Although the novel explores opposing ideas, which in most cases would cancel each other out, Woolf organizes the form to sustain the unification of the opposing ideas. For this reason, *The Waves* serves as a fine conclusion for the study of time in Woolf’s work; it accomplishes in one novel what both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando* separately hint at.

The most obvious difference in the three novels “consists mainly on which shape Woolf chose to present them” (Vieira 16). Whereas *Mrs. Dalloway* has no chapter divisions whatsoever (its form strengthening its alliance with Bergson’s *durée*), and *Orlando* has strict divisions (Chapter One, Chapter Two, etcetera, divided by historical era), *The Waves* has elements of both. Again, we find chapter divisions

called ‘sections’, but they are not numbered — rather, they are separated by italicized passages often referred to as ‘interludes.’

The sections follow the lives of six characters, three females and three males, from youth to old age, and in some cases, death. The thoughts of the characters are presented through soliloquy; no character ever speaks directly to another. In these sections, “Mrs. Woolf has not attempted to give a consecutive narrative or to isolate distinct characters. Her aim is to convey the half-lights of human experience and the fluid edges of personal identity. Her six characters fuse, towards the end, into a synthesis of sensation” (Goldman 21). But Woolf connects her characters in other ways as well.<sup>21</sup> Instead of using chiming clocks, as she did in *Mrs. Dalloway*, in *The Waves* Woolf uses other time indicators that function as shared components between the characters’ soliloquies. As particular characters soliloquize their experiences at school, their observations of humanity, simple objects such as a sundial<sup>22</sup> or the seven-sided flower that personifies them as a group, connects each character to the others in time and space, as they discuss the same objects or observations.

However, an expected time indicator does not always form the connections between soliloquies. For example, the first section begins with each character speaking one sentence. The beginnings of those sentences are as follows:

---

<sup>21</sup> The connection between characters was an important point for Woolf, as she stated: “The six characters were supposed to be one. I’m getting old myself... and I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect oneself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sort of separate feelings. Therefore I wanted to give the sense of continuity, instead of which most people say, no you’ve given the sense of flowing and passing away and that nothing matters” (*Letters* 4: 397).

<sup>22</sup> “Man took advantage of the cyclical movement of the sun and built the first type of instrument to fragment time in equal parts: the sundial” (Vieira 18).

‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard,

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan,

‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda,

‘I see a globe,’ said Neville,

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny,

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis (*The Waves* 9).

Here each sentence reveals a sensory experience, which connects the characters in the same way that Big Ben connected Peter Walsh and Septimus Smith. We see their soliloquies, and therefore the characters themselves, existing in the same time and space without the need for overt narration or explanation from the characters. The soliloquies that immediately follow those mentioned above relate to observations of nature. In this way a pattern has been formed, as the characters all speak in turn on the same topic. Although it deviates slightly throughout the course of the novel, Woolf establishes the interrelationship between the characters by creating this pattern on the first page.

Other indicators are given within each section to signify the passage of time between them. In the first section, Rhoda reveals that the characters are youthful: “Miss Hudson spreads our copy-books on the schoolroom table” (18). The second discloses their separate voyages to boarding schools or colleges: “The cab is at the door... I am going to school for the first time” (30), says Bernard, which makes way for the other boys’ descriptions of the same experience. The third section continues as Bernard discusses “college” (76). The fourth section reveals Bernard’s

engagement, Jinny's assertion that the characters are "not yet twenty-five" (141), and contains a farewell dinner for their friend Percival, who is going to India, while the fifth reveals news of Percival's death. In the sixth section, Louis describes himself as a "full-grown man" (167), and in the seventh Jinny exclaims, "How solitary, how shrunk, how aged! I am no longer young. I am no longer part of the procession" (193). In the eighth, Bernard states, "Being now all of us middle-aged, loads are on us. Let us put down our loads" (211). The ninth section is an abridgment; a summation of their lives as told by Bernard, the storyteller. The path of their lives is revisited from his perspective. It is here that we learn of Rhoda's suicide, and as the section comes to its close, Bernard rages against Death, the enemy, in a whirlwind of rediscovered youth: "It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (297). It is not until his old age that Bernard is able to circle back upon his youth in an avengement against death.

The interludes are reminiscent of Nietzsche's work from the very first page. Woolf personifies a woman "couched beneath the horizon" (7) who raises a lamp to reveal colors in the water and sky, the quality of the air, until finally her lamp becomes the sun itself: "an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold" (8). Nietzsche, too, used the image of a lantern in *The Gay Science*, the book in which he declared God's death. In it, Nietzsche tells the parable of a madman with a lantern who is in search of God (in *The Waves*, it is a woman

with a lamp who brings the morning). After his declaration of, and admission of responsibility for, the death of God by the hand of humanity, the madman states,

But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns?... Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning (Kaufmann 181-2)?

The image of the lantern is often attributed to Nietzsche.<sup>23</sup> Since Woolf's novel contains a reference to a lamp on the first page, it seems to serve as a signal for things to come. Its reference may be a nod to Nietzsche and an indication of the message that follows.

Nietzsche's theories resonate throughout the sections and interludes of *The Waves*. To revisit Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence, the pathway Zarathustra finds at the top of the mountain splits into two roads that form a circle. The circle represents the repeated path of our experiences that are associated with eternal recurrence. Throughout *The Waves*, the symbol of the circle abounds. Indeed, within the narrative we find a 'circle' of friends; Bernard sees a gold ring hanging above him in "a loop of light" (*The Waves* 9) and discusses words as "smoke rings" (67) that connect people; Neville sees a "globe" (9); both Susan and Rhoda refer to Jinny as a

---

<sup>23</sup> Dionysus first used the image of the lamp some two thousand years before Nietzsche.

dancer “pirouetting” (98, 161) from place to place; Louis discusses a “ring of steel” (40), feels the rhythm of others as a “waltz tune, eddying in and out, round and round” (93), and suffers from an illness called “chilblains, the penalty of an imperfect circulation” (244); Susan wonders who she is as she watches her dog “nose in a circle” (98) and claims that “a circle has been cast on the waters” (142) when she discovers Bernard’s engagement. In the concluding chapter of the novel, Bernard likens his life to a “globe” that has “roundness, weight, depth,” (238) which “we turn about in our fingers” (251). These examples, in addition to phrases such as “one sound, steel blue, circular” (135) and “the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring” (145), help solidify the image of the circle in relation to Nietzsche’s theory.

But again, we see clocks, the more obvious symbol of passing time. Rhoda watches the clock in the classroom and uses it as a metaphor for her exile from society:

Meaning has gone. The clock ticks. The two hands are convoys marching through a desert. The black bars on the clock face are green oases. The long hand has marched ahead to find water. The other painfully stumbles among hot stones in the desert... Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join — so — and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, ‘Oh, save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!’” (21-2).

Bernard, too, sees the clock as a negative presence: “I must make phrases and phrases and so interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry” (30). Neville uses the clock coupled with his acceptance of time’s effect on relationships and human intimacy: “I shall propose meeting — under a clock, by some Cross; and shall wait, and he will not come. It is for that that I love him. Oblivious, almost entirely ignorant, he will pass from my life. And I shall pass, incredible as it seems, into other lives” (60). Later he reflects on the effect that the clock itself can have on human intimacy: “‘Why look,’ said Neville, ‘at the clock ticking on the mantelpiece? Time passes, yes. And we grow old. But to sit with you, alone with you, here in London in this firelit room, you there, I here, is all’” (177). Louis states that his “roots are threaded, like fibres in a flower-pot, round and round about the world. I do not wish to come to the top and live in the light of this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks” (20). Here, however, the clock is a metaphor for the sun, reminding us of the importance of the sun in reference to the measure of time.

The italicized interludes place a heavy focus on the sun and the natural world. Through exploring the path of the sun throughout one day, they record the impressions that the sun makes on nature. “Elements such as the sun and the ocean give a more harmonized view of the duration of the universe as a whole, without giving much emphasis to the notion of decay” (Vieira 17). Woolf highlights the way that sunlight dances on the waves, fills up rooms, and brings out certain colors in houses and decorations. The interaction between birds and trees, of sun and water are

brought to the forefront. Vibrant colors and images thrive in these interludes, making the reader startlingly aware of the sun's impact on everything beneath it. Of course, one easily recognizes that there is a pattern in the interludes, as the sun plays a major part in providing sequence and "something in succession and with a duration" (Vieira 17).

The sequence of the interludes is noticeably highlighted to give a particular structure to the novel. The first sentences of each interlude are as follows:

The sun had not yet risen (7).

The sun rose higher (29).

The sun rose (73).

The sun, risen, no longer couched on a green mattress darting a fitful glance through watery jewels, bared its face and looked straight over the waves (108).

The sun had risen to its full height (148).

The sun no longer stood in the middle of the sky (165).

The sun had now sunk lower in the sky (182).

The sun was sinking (207).

Now the sun had sunk (236).

The waves broke on the shore (297). The sun's voyage<sup>24</sup> seems to be complete, as the novel ends and the characters are either very aged, or have died.

---

<sup>24</sup> Here it must be pointed out that it is the earth that moves, not the sun. However, for the purposes of this argument, the sun must be looked at from the perspective of human observation, as "the sun in itself does not measure anything; it is the human necessity to fragment the flux which imposes upon

However, the final interlude “comes to close the book, but, at the same time, it opens the ending insofar as the waves are a symbol for the endless succession” (Vieira 19). As readers, we know that the pattern of the sun repeats itself, so the life cycle here must be incomplete. As Kumar states:

This novel attempts to communicate an almost inexpressible fluid impulse behind all human experience. Its basic intent can again be analyzed in terms of durational flux. Here Virginia Woolf has tried to project time on two different levels: the normal lifespan and the diurnal movement of the sun... she presents, through such symbols as the rise and decline of the sun and waves, a single day’s duration as already shown in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Each phase of the lives of the six characters in the novel corresponds to each of the nine progressive phases of the sun (Kumar 68).

If the path of the sun is to be understood as the major metaphor for the lives of the characters then the characters must be able to carry on even after death, as the sun’s movement across the sky does not cease at the end of the day — it keeps moving, only to rise again the next day. Similarly, at dawn the “sea was indistinguishable from the sky” (7), while again at sunset the “sky and sea were indistinguishable” (236). Therefore, the sea appears the same at the beginning and the end of the novel, suggesting a perfect cycle. This duration, or continuation, suggests a Bergsonian influence, but is a more Nietzschean symbol for eternal recurrence, as the sun repeats itself rather than continues in a straight line. The title of the novel strengthens this

---

the sun the characteristic of measurer of time” (Vieira 18). This view is consistent with the theories of both Augustine and Kant.

argument, as it suggests the repetition of the waves as another metaphor for eternal recurrence. Each wave is, in essence, a wave that has already been.

Many writers have used the path of the sun as a symbol to represent the stages of life. Shakespeare's seventy-third sonnet references the sun as a metaphor for passing time: "In me thou seest the twilight of such day / As after sunset fadeth in the west, / Which, by and by black night doth take away, / Death's second self, that seals up all in rest" (Shakespeare 5-8). The speaker is in his mid-life, but is getting older and soon will be dead. This message is successfully delivered through the image of a setting sun. Similarly, on her carriage ride to the afterlife in "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," Emily Dickinson expresses youth, mid-life, and death through the lines: "We passed the School, where Children strove / At Recess — in the Ring — / We passed the Fields of Grazing Grain — / We passed the Setting Sun — / Or rather — He passed Us" (Dickinson 9-13). Not only does Dickinson use the imagery of the setting sun to represent the final stage of life (coupled with the image of a ring), but she suggests that the path of the sun continues after her death; the sun passes *them*, just as Woolf's waves break on the shore in the final interlude of *The Waves*.

There are ten interludes against nine sections in *The Waves*. The connection between the sections and the interludes is as follows: the interludes trace the path of the sun across the sky on one day, while the sections trace the path of six human lives from youth to old age. But the relationship between the sections and the interludes in *The Waves* is the same that connects these three novels in such an intriguing way. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, we see one human life represented in one day; in *Orlando*, we see

one human life represented over nearly four hundred years. *Mrs. Dalloway* makes the particular into a universal, while *Orlando* makes the universal into a particular. *The Waves* is able to successfully accomplish both through the interaction between the interludes and the sections — this novel contains both the universal and the particular in two distinctly opposing forms.

*The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.*

—Albert Einstein

Woolf's use of the concept of time relates specifically to the whole of modern fiction; the modern writers' goal is, as Ezra Pound states, to "make it new." Though the examination of the concept of time had been practiced for thousands of years, Woolf's revamping of the beliefs, ideas, and theories of her predecessors made them her own. Those who came before her, such as Dionysus, St. Augustine, and Immanuel Kant, as well as contemporaries such as Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Albert Einstein, experimented with the notion that time is a construction created by humanity in order to function in a well-ordered society. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf grants, both to herself and those that will come after her, the permission to continue these thoughts through writing, thereby validating critical analyses of her writing through comparison with her contemporaries.

Kohler states that the modern novelist "cannot order the processes of time itself; what he can control, within the limits of his art, is the sense of its passing and duration" (Kohler 24). By utilizing different constructions of time in her novels, Woolf creates multiple narrative realities that function independently from each other.

This technique not only supports the constructionist angle of the modern literary treatment of time, but also suggests different interpretations of reality and human consciousness. Woolf suggests a system of thought to explain the experience of writing in this way, and describes it as a 'shock:'

At any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven, certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself.

And I see this when I have a shock (*A Sketch of the Past* 72).

This passage reveals Woolf's belief in the interconnectedness of humanity, the arts, and the patterns of the world. We are as much *Hamlet* as we are Beethoven, and for Woolf's characters, as much Plato as Bergson. The use of constructed time in Woolf's novels extends the timelessness that exists within human consciousness and the human experience, and is achieved by weaving images of clocks, the sun, repeated symbolic numbers, circles, and other inanimate objects with their impact on humanity.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the Bergsonian models of temps and durée are explored through several methods; Clarissa's observations as she walks the streets of London, Peter Walsh's memories of his youthful love affair with Clarissa, Septimus Smith's war-torn madness, the chimes of Big Ben both in the foreground and background of

almost every scene, and finally through Clarissa's aunt, who arrives at the party though everyone believes that she is dead. *Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf's experiment on memory and psychological time.

In *Orlando*, time as examined from the perspective of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity reveals itself through a character who ages twenty years in four centuries, changes gender, travels to Constantinople, lives with the Gipsies, and finally falls in love at the most present moment Woolf could express. In this novel the focus is not on the surrounding clocks, but rather on specific periods of time and ages in history, as exact dates, times, and numbers are revealed on nearly every page. The reader's disbelief is suspended as Woolf masterfully explores the Einsteinian relativism of time; Orlando creates his/her own time, outlasting buildings, lovers, and the reigns of kings and queens. *Orlando* is Woolf's experiment on historical time.

*The Waves*, arguably a more complicated novel than the previous two, succeeds in its combination of many differing notions of time. The sections are a straightforward chronological study of the lives of six characters, while the interludes expose the path of the sun across one day's sky. The backdrop of the recurrent waves and images of circles, loops, and globes subtly suggest Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence. Woolf's exploration of time in *The Waves* is a combination of the aims of the two previous novels, while its experimentation with form and style emerges as a prose-poem.

Although many would classify Woolf as a novelist, the larger significance of Woolf's work depends upon her definition as a poet. In 1821, Percy Bysshe Shelley

wrote “A Defence of Poetry,” in which he defended poets and the poetic form as integral entities. Poets are here defined as anyone:

in the infancy of art [who] observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results... those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word (Shelley 791).

He extends this definition not only to writers of poetry, but writers of prose, philosophy, music and dance, teachers, legislators, prophets, etc. Woolf, then, qualifies as a poet not only as a result of the form and style in *The Waves*, but also by Shelley’s definition. She refuses an imposed societal order to the concept of time and instead “observes an order” approximating a sensibility closer to that from which the sensibility of time is born. Her three novels, then, arguably three of the most revolutionary novels of the twentieth century, are her ‘poems.’

The cost of the nonexistence of such poems is that “language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse,” for “poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated it” (Shelley 791). Woolf’s poetry achieves what Shelley believed to be the crowning glory of all poetry; it lifts the veil of time, reality, and consciousness to allow for (and also to elicit) differing interpretations of these subjects. Instead of asking eternal and existential questions outright, she proposes new realities that forced modern writers

and readers alike to ask those same questions of themselves, while perpetuating an epistemological “thinking in common” that continues today.

These three novels are successful presentations of the connection between reality, human consciousness, and the concept of time, and their gravity is revealed through their place in the modern literary tradition. Woolf’s writing does follow the flow of the modern novelist; she rebels against the rigid structures of time as recognized by society, and burrows down to the very heart of human consciousness, allowing her own constructions of time to control her characters’ thoughts and behaviors, modeling each novel after a constructed concept of time that was rooted thousands of years before her. As a modern novelist, she is compelled to experiment with such ideas and methods. As a poet, however, she is obliged to because she must seek “that from which this highest delight results.” Her exploration of time is not simply literary, but philosophical. For the breadth of her work to be realized she cannot be titled simply a ‘Modern Novelist,’ but rather, an ‘Augustinian-Dionysian-Kantian-Bergsonian-Einsteinean-Nietzschean-Woolfian Modern Poet-Novelist.’

In her later personal writing we can see Woolf continuing the poetic quest to lift the veil. In a passage similar to the opening pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf states: “Can we count on another 20 years? I shall be fifty on [the] 25<sup>th</sup>, Monday week, that is, and sometimes I feel that I have lived 250 years already, and sometimes that I am still the youngest person in the omnibus” (*A Writer’s Diary* 178). Perhaps her own aging motivated her to write novels that suggest life’s duration, relativity, or recurrence. Or, as is suggested both in the text of *Orlando* and by Hermione Lee in

her study of Woolf's fiction, perhaps each age does call for a new literary treatment.

Either way, as Einstein said, the most important thing is to keep questioning.

Questioning, certainly the root of every novel, is what led Woolf to her exploration of time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, and *The Waves*, and what will lead us to continue to explore the fiction of Virginia Woolf.

---

<sup>i</sup> "First, Clarissa thinks of preparations for a party in the immediate future; then she shifts to the present moment and considers what a fine morning it is; there is a 'flashback' over twenty years in which she thinks of the fine days at Bourton (the principle of free association is working here also, of course); still in the past, but on a specific day she recalls a conversation with Peter Walsh in minute detail (the 'close-up in operation'); there follows a vision in the near future of Peter Walsh's proposed visit to London; at this point, the device of 'multiple-view' is employed and we leave Clarissa's consciousness for a few lines to enter that of a stranger who observes Clarissa crossing the street; back in Clarissa's stream we find her contemplating, in the present moment, her love for Westminster; there is a 'fade-out' of her sentimental musings and she recalls the previous evening's conversation about the War being over; this in turn 'fades-out' and we are back with her joy at being part of London at the present moment; here the principle of 'cutting' is employed to present a brief conversation Clarissa has with Hugh Whitbread, whom she meets on the street; the conversation, as it is freely reported, 'fades-out' to lose itself in Clarissa's stream of consciousness again while she is concerned with various aspects of the Whitbreads; the time quickly shifts (with images of the Whitbreads) from an indefinite past, to the present moment, to the immediate future, and to the far past; still in the far past, Clarissa thinks of Peter and Hugh at Bourton; this is abruptly changed by cutting' to contemplations again of the fine weather at the present moment; which 'fades out' to thoughts of Clarissa's own 'divine vitality' as she knew herself in the indefinite past.

The record to now has covered only six of the first unit of sixteen pages, but this is sufficient to illustrate the time-montage of Clarissa's consciousness, and how it, along with free association, defines the movement of the stream" (51-2).

## Works Cited

- Alexander, Jean. *The Venture of Form in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*. Port Washington: Kennikat, 1974.
- Augustine, St. *Confessions*. Trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Random House, 1944.
- . *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Trans. F.L. Pogson. London: Macmillan, 1910.
- Dick, Susan. "Literary Realism in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *The Waves*." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellars. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 50-71.
- Dickinson, Emily. *Emily Dickinson Poems*. Ed. Brenda Hillman. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.
- Eastman, George. "The Importance of Calendar Reform to the Business World." *Nation's Business*. 14 (1926): 42, 46. 10 Feb 2004. <<http://personal.ecu.edu/mccartyr/eastman.html>>.
- Einstein, Albert. "The Principle of Relativity (In the Restricted Sense)." *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. Trans. Robert W. Lawson. 1920. 13 Feb 2005. <<http://www.bartleby.com/173/5.html>>.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. 'The Oversoul.' *The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr. Cambridge: Belknap, 1987.

- German, Howard, and Sharon Kaehele. "The Dialectic of Time in *Orlando*." *College English* 24 (1962): 35-41. *JSTOR*. 7 Jul 2004. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Goldman, Jane, ed. *Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse, The Waves; Columbia Critical Guides*. Columbia UP: New York, 1998.
- Hasler, Jorg. "Virginia Woolf and the Chimes of Big Ben." *English Studies* 63.2 (1982): 145-58.
- Hergenhahn, B.R. *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1997.
- Humphrey, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1954.
- James, Henry. 'London Notes.' *Notes on Novelists*. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1969.
- Kohler, Dayton. "Time in the Modern Novel." *College English* 10.1 (1948): 15-24. *JSTOR*. 8 May 2004. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Kumar, Shiv. *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*. London: Blackie, 1962.
- Lee, Hermione. *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977.
- McNeer, Rebecca. "The Uses of History: *Orlando* and the Countess of Desmond." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 64 (2003): 4-5.
- McNeillie, Andrew. "Bloomsbury." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellars. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. Roy Flannagan. New York: Macmillan, 1993.
- Moncur, Michael. "Quotation #35032 — William Faulkner." *The Quotations Page*.  
Ed. Michael Moncur. 16 March 2005.  
<<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/35032.html>>.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage,  
1974.
- . *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Trans. Thomas Common. New York: Dover, 1999.
- Roe, Sue, and Susan Sellars, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Robinson, Dave and Judy Groves. *Introducing Philosophy*. New York: Totem, 1999.
- Rodrigues, Chris, and Chris Garratt. *Introducing Modernism*. Cambridge: Icon,  
2001.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Mysticism and Logic*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1957.
- Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare Complete*. Ed. Sir Henry Irving. New York:  
World Syndicate, 1926.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry." *The Norton Anthology of English  
Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt. Vol. 2. New York:  
W. W. Norton, 2000. 790-802.
- Snow, Lotus. "The Wreckful Siege: Disorder in *The Waves*." *Research Studies* 42.2  
(1974): 71-80.
- Strathern, Paul. *St. Augustine in 90 Minutes*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997.
- . *Nietzsche in 90 Minutes*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

- . *The Big Idea Collected: 6 Revolutionary Ideas that Changed the World*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1999.
- Tenny, Jenn. *Metamorphosis*. "A Beautiful Mind: Albert Einstein Quotations." Ed. Jenn Tenny. 10 Nov. 2004.  
<<http://www.tenny.com/einstein/index.html>>.
- Vieira, Josalba Ramalho. "Henri Bergson's Idea of Duration and Virginia Woolf's Novels." *Ilha do Desterro* 24.2 (1990): 9-20.
- Whitworth, Michael. "Virginia Woolf and Modernism." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellars. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 146-63.
- . "'The Lighted Strip of History': Virginia Woolf and Einsteinian Simultaneity." *Virginia Woolf: Turning the Centuries: Selected Papers From the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott. New York: Pace UP, 2000. 304-10.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer's Diary*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. New York: Harcourt, 1954.
- . *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 5 vols. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. Orlando: Harcourt, 1979-85.
- . *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 4. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. New York: Harvest, 1981.
- . *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harvest, 1979.
- . "A Sketch of the Past." *The Moment and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1948.

---. *The Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt, 1925.

---. *Mrs. Dalloway*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.

---. *Orlando*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1993.

---. *The Waves*. New York: Harcourt, 1931.