



"دراسة موضوعات الصحة العقلية والنفسية وإدراك الذات في رواية فرجينيا وولف السيدة دالواي
(Exploring Interiority and Insanity: A Psychological Study of Woolf's Mrs.
Dalloway)

1Marwa Taha Abid / University of Diyala/ College of Education for Humanities Sciences
2 Assist. Inst. Mathaar Haseeb Mahmoud / Diyala Education Directorate

Abstract

This paper analyzes Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (1925), mental distress is reconfigured to form a system of critique of the gendered norms and the medical paternalism of inter-war Britain. By comparing the repressed anxiety of Clarissa with the traumatic shell shock of Septimus Smith, the study demonstrates how Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique and Bergson's temporality juxtapose the conformity of the public with the anguish of the self, revealing the violence inherent in normative social categories. The overlapping subjectivities within the novel, interpreted through the feminist and trauma theory, destabilize the authority of psychiatry represented by Dr. Bradshaw and his replacement of coercion, as embodied in the doctor, by empathy. Finally, the paper approaches it as a psychological map that demonstrates common vulnerabilities beneath broken realities, challenging pathologizing discourses of mental health.

Email:

marwa.en.hum@uodiyala.edu.iq
maathirr1901@gmail.com

Published: 1- 6 -2026

Keywords: Virginia, Stream of consciousness and Psychology.

هذه مقالة وصول مفتوح بموجب ترخيص
CC BY 4.0

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في رواية فرجينيا وولف "السيدة دالاوي" (1925) لمقاربة ثيمات الصحة العقلية، والسيكولوجيا، وإدراك الذات في بريطانيا ما بين الحربين. وفي مواجهة وصمة العار الاجتماعية والممارسات الطبية القمعية، تنتقد الورقة الطب النفسي المؤسسي (المتجسد في شخصية الدكتور برادشو) وإنكار الصدمة المرتبط بالنوع الاجتماعي في شخصيات مثل كلاريسا دالاوي وسيتيموس سميث. وباستخدامها تقنية تيار الوعي والزمنية البيروغسونية، تعارض وولف مظاهر المطابقة السطحية والمعاناة الداخلية، كاشفةً عن صراعات نفسية كونية. إن ذاتيات الشخصيات المتقطعة والمتشابكة معاً في الرواية تقوض المعايير المجتمعية الصارمة، داعية إلى التعاطف بدلاً من القمع. وتعمل هذه البحث في خاتمة المطاف بوصفه خريطةً سيكولوجية تكشف عن القواسم المشتركة الكامنة تحت سطح الوقائع المتباينة ظاهرياً.

I. Introduction

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf stands as a groundbreaking modernist novel which follows a single day in London after World War I. Through the parallel storylines of Clarissa Dalloway's party preparations and Septimus Warren Smith's shell-shock experiences Woolf reveals how people experience mental breakdowns and the broken nature of human mental processes. Through its stream-of-consciousness style the novel breaks away from traditional storytelling methods to guide readers through the characters' mental processes and personal experiences.¹

Woolf established interiority as the central focus of writing through her innovative literary style. The two examples show how characters' inner experiences create their reality because Clarissa thinks about her past ("What a lark! What a plunge!") and Septimus experiences strange memories of his deceased comrade ("Evans, Evans!")². This device is an example of Woolf's philosophy that fiction has the responsibility to present life "as it really is," a "luminous halo" consisting of impressions and sensations³.

Moreover, the significant are the elements that founded upon her mental health struggles. Diagnosed as having bipolar disorder, she lived through episodes of intense depression and mania⁴, which, in her diaries, she called "a physical collapse" which left her "sunk in a pit of horror"⁵. Comments such as those from scholars such as Caramagno⁶ suggest that personal knowledge from her own experience of psychological distress underlies her sympathetic depiction of Septimus's PTSD and Clarissa's inner despair. Her fiction critiqued social rejection of mental illness, again specifically for those who were either women or returning soldiers in the 1920s⁷. By integrating personal experience and

modernist innovation, Woolf weaves an enduring inquiry into mental health, identity, and perception-themes that resonate powerfully in today's discourse about psychological well-being..

Mrs. Dalloway (1925) is firmly rooted in the aftermath of World War I, an era of intense societal disorientation. After the conflict ended, Britain was left reeling from devastation, suffering, and disillusionment. Millions of soldiers came home wounded, physically and emotionally, but society was not willing or prepared to value their pain. Woolf critiques such disconnection through Septimus Warren Smith, a combat veteran suffering from shell shock (now referred to as PTSD), whose hallucinations and despair represent the unseeable battle marks ⁸. Civilians were not exempt from changing norms either: Women's roles were enhanced during the conflict, but post-war social pressures toward returning to traditional domesticity, reflected in Clarissa Dalloway's position as a hostess in society, emphasized residual gender conflict ⁹.

The first twenty years of the 20th century brought new psychological ideas into public discussion because of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Septimus' disorganized mental state which included believing trees had life force demonstrates the changing psychological understanding of the time according to Freudian theory about trauma and repression ¹⁰. The medical field at that time operated with basic treatment methods. The medical approach of Dr. Bradshaw who prescribed rest and institutionalization for Septimus demonstrates the paternalistic psychiatric practices of his era which prioritized social control above patient care. Woolf used her diary to mock the rest cure treatment she received for bipolar disorder by writing "I fight with doctors" ¹¹.

People in the 1920s held strong negative views about mental illness which created social discrimination against those who suffered from it. People during that time period used to view depressive disorders and PTSD-related conditions as evidence of moral failure. The way others viewed Septimus's death as cowardice demonstrates their lack of understanding about his situation. Woolf rejects social discrimination by showing how Septimus used his death to fight against oppressive social rules when he says "Death was defiance" ¹². The same, Clarissa's affected worry ("She feared time itself") describes the inner turmoil of women, whose mental health was considered trivial as an instance of "hysteria" ¹³.

With these themes, Woolf highlights the conflict between societal pressures and personal agony, challenging people to acknowledge human suffering due to ignorance.

II. Literature Review

1. Existing Scholarship on Mental Health in *Mrs. Dalloway* & Trauma and Shell Shock

Email: djhr@uodiyala.edu.iq

The study of Mrs. Dalloway has consistently included a focus on Septimus Warren Smith as the prism through which Woolf criticizes early twentieth-century psychiatry, although there is a sharp divergence among the critics. The *Female Malady* (1977) by Elaine Showalter asserts that Septimus appeared in a cultural history of gendered mental illness: to the extent that male trauma was reluctantly recognized as a result of war, it was coded as a failure of masculine stoicism at the same time that the psychological suffering of women was trivialized as hysteria. In his framework, Showalter foreshadows a systemic misogyny, but instead what she does in her analysis is to subordinate the specific war experience that Septimus was experiencing to a larger gender narrative that leaves the texture of his post-traumatic subjectivity unexplored.

Thomas Caramagno in *The Flight of the Mind* (1992) fills this gap by reading the hallucinations of Septimus, including the repetitive cry of Evans, Evans! in inverted proportion to the same hallucinations of the same character that afflicted Woolf in later life. The biographical approach of Caramagno is a powerful humanizing of the madness of Septimus as a psychological experience and not merely a thematic technique, but it risks making the novel a mirror of the pathology of Woolf, instead of a social critique of the world the characters inhabit, such as Showalter highlights. It is a matter of systemic indictment of gender norms to Showalter; a most personal charting of affective turmoil to Caramagno. Both these readings are neither incompatible, nor do they need to be integrated; Woolf's own experience of medical coercion is arguably fuelling both the sympathetic interiority Caramagno identifies and the feminist diagnosis Showalter foregrounds¹⁴.

The frame is extended by critics later. Jay Winter (2014) dates the trauma of Septimus to historical realities, which suppressed returning soldiers by telling them the rest cure. The emphasis by Winter on institutional abandonment is complementary to the gender analysis by Showalter and also in the same line with the transhistorical trauma theory by Judith Herman (*Trauma and Recovery*, 1992). The idea of trauma as identity-shattering that Herman developed is reflected in the style of fragments and the stream-of-consciousness that Woolf uses when she writes the novel. But Herman writes in a clinicalism that fails to attend to literary form, whereas the historical specificity that Winter is offering sometimes overshadows the psychological subtleties which Caramagno and Herman are respectively supplying. The field therefore swings between cultural, biographical and clinical lenses, each shedding light on various aspects of the broken mind of Woolf as depicted. Taking recourse to these complementary systems, the current paper argues that Woolf is not only an expression of mental distress but is literally performing it through narrative fragmentation as a way of challenging the

reductive labels applied to both the public trauma of Septimus and the hidden trauma in the case of Clarissa ¹⁵.

Woolf's narrative, too, fits into current trauma theory. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) emphasizes how trauma "shatters" identity, a phenomenon reflected in Septimus's disjointed thoughts ("The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?") and Woolf's stream-of-consciousness writing style. Woolf presents mental health as a universal human experience through her combination of Septimus's story with Clarissa's quiet battles which challenges the conventional gendered and pathological views of her time ¹⁶.

2. Critiques of Medical Paternalism: Dr. Bradshaw as a Symbol of Oppressive Institutional Psychiatry

The role of Dr. Bradshaw in the novel has led to a more coherent, yet still fragmented, critical mass. The biographical key which critics constantly, though not always, quote, is furnished, indeed, by the personal diaries of Woolf, where she writes, I fight with doctors... they forbid everything¹⁷. Caramagno reads Bradshaw as a simple imposition of the repressive psychiatric culture, which Woolf underwent, on the rhetoric of proportion as a method of moral judgment and a similar conflation of mental suffering with social deviance. This reading is similar to Barker (2010) who considers Bradshaw as a representative of the institutional state, exercising psychiatric power in the pretext of care to impose conformity. To Barker, the argument of Woolf is not just directed at individual doctors but to the very organization as a society which pathologizes non-normative practice¹⁸.

Woolf developed her depiction of Bradshaw through her personal experiences with medical institutions that operated under patriarchal control. The doctors diagnosed her with bipolar disorder before they forced her to undergo coercive "rest cures" which she documented as dehumanizing in her diary entries: "I fight with doctors... they forbid everything"¹⁹. . The medical order to isolate Septimus from others through "rest" treatment strips him of his autonomy while treating his suffering as a matter of discipline ²⁰. Caramagno (1992) supports the idea that Bradshaw embodies a culture which views vulnerable behavior as proof of moral weakness.

Bradshaw serves as more than a medical professional because he holds power within institutional structures. The title "Sir William" establishes his position as a member of Britain's ruling elite which demonstrates that psychiatry functioned to maintain social stability instead of showing empathy ²¹. Septimus chooses death because he refuses to accept Bradshaw's methods of forced socialization which Woolf calls "conversion". The act demonstrates opposition to a system which values domination above all else while disability activists today continue to fight against this approach ²². Through his depiction of Bradshaw as a

villain Woolf encourages readers to fight against institutions that use psychiatric labels to suppress human emotions. Through his character Woolf demonstrates how institutions use their power to enforce oppression under the guise of providing care.

III. Analysis and Discussion:

1. Gender and Mental Health in *Mrs. Dalloway* (Feminist Readings of Clarissa Dalloway's Repressed Emotions)

The *Female Malady* (1977) by Elaine Showalter offers a definite feminist paradigm to read the mental illness in Mrs. Dalloway as historically and institutionally gendered. According to Showalter, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century psychiatry created a dichotomy with male madness attributed to external factors, such as war, whereas female madness was pathologized as an inherent state of hysteria a failure of femininity itself. The twin story of the hidden suffering of Clarissa Dalloway and the explicit collapse of Septimus Warren Smith unveils the tragic effects of this duality²³. Her inside discussions present a woman caught between her public persona ("herself a knife") and inner delicacies, a tension Virginia Woolf struggled throughout her life as a woman living in a male-controlled world.

Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1977) contextualizes Clarissa's anxiety within a tradition in which women's mental health has been dismissed as "hysteria." Whereas Septimus's trauma is acknowledged (albeit stigmatised) as a result of warfare, Clarissa's suffering is denied, explained away as a flight of a "sensitive" woman's imagination. For instance, her withdrawing into an empty room is a metaphor for the narrow space available for women's experiences of emotion within a culture requiring social performance at all times.

2. Contrast Between Male and Female Experiences of Mental Distress

Woolf's differences between Clarissa's internalized suffering and Septimus Warren Smith's overt psychological breakdown to critique gendered perceptions of mental health:

A. Septimus (Male Trauma): His "shell shock"/PTSD results from combat, a publicly accepted, masculine trauma. While his hallucinations ("Evans, Evans!") are pathological, his suffering is validated in terms of the war hero narrative. But he has failed repeatedly by a system of medicine (personified in Dr. Bradshaw) that values domination rather than healing.

B. Clarissa (Female Repression): Her suffering rises from *private* struggles, unfulfilled desires, older people, and societal rejection. Her mental health is extracted invisibly, framed as a personal weakness rather than a legitimate crisis.

The author Woolf experienced bipolar disorder while facing patriarchal psychiatric practices which created this dual perspective. Woolf documented in

her diary entries that she felt trapped by societal expectations which forced her to follow gender-based rules while she wrote "The future is dark which I believe makes it the most promising future possible" ²⁴. The way society treats mental health issues between men and women differs because men's suffering becomes a tool for aggression yet women's suffering remains hidden.

Woolf uses Clarissa and Septimus to demonstrate how society applies different standards to mental health based on gender. The patriarchal society views Septimus's trauma as a public issue yet it labels Clarissa's condition as a personal shortcoming. The two characters seek liberty which proves that people exceed the labels society creates for them.

3. Psychological Frameworks in Woolf's Work (Modernist Psychology)

Virginia Woolf used experimental storytelling techniques in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to express her interest in modern psychological ideas from the early 20th century which included William James's stream of consciousness theory and subtle allusions to Freudian psychoanalytic concepts. Through these techniques she created a revolutionary modernist approach to study human consciousness by making internal experiences more important than traditional storytelling structures.

4. William James and the "Stream of Consciousness"

William James's concept of consciousness as a continuous "stream" rather than a chain of discrete ideas (1890) provides a vocabulary for what Woolf achieves narratively in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but the theoretical label matters less than how the technique actually functions on the page. Woolf does not simply represent mental flow; she uses it to structure the entire narrative, dissolving the boundary between external event and internal response so that the reader inhabits psychological distress rather than merely observing it ²⁵.

The novel's opening immediately establishes this method. "What a lark! What a plunge!" (Woolf, 1925, p. 3) is not framed as a clearly situated memory but erupts into Clarissa's present consciousness as she steps into the London morning, triggered by the fresh air and the sensation of being alive. The narrative offers no transition, no "she remembered", the past floods the present just as it does in actual thought. Moments later, her mind shifts again: "She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged". The paradox is not intellectually resolved but emotionally registered, and the stream-of-consciousness technique allows that contradiction to stand as psychologically truthful. Woolf is not simply recording sensory data; she is reproducing the associative logic of memory, where a single moment can collapse decades, and where feelings of vitality and dread coexist without narrative resolution. This fluidity captures precisely the "luminous halo" of consciousness Woolf described in her essay "Modern Fiction"

(1984), a psychological realism that traditional plot structures could not accommodate²⁶.

Septimus's sections push this technique into more obviously disordered territory, dramatizing the disintegration that trauma produces. When the car backfires on Bond Street, Septimus does not register a mundane noise; his consciousness immediately transforms it into a scene of threat: "The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?" (p. 17). Woolf's narration here follows James's stream not as a calm river but as a turbulent flood, where present sensory input merges seamlessly with intrusive memory and hallucination. The reader is given no external anchor separating reality from delusion because Septimus himself has none. His repeated cry, "Evans, Evans!" (p. 25), surfaces without warning, pulling the prose into the trenches alongside him. The stream-of-consciousness technique thus becomes not just a stylistic choice but a formal enactment of PTSD's core feature: the collapse of temporal distance, the inability to keep the past in the past²⁷. Briggs (2005) notes that Woolf's use of the method "captures the mind's spontaneity," but its purpose in Mrs. Dalloway is sharper than mere spontaneity. By giving Clarissa's quiet existential distress and Septimus's spectacular madness the same narrative treatment, the same fluid temporality, the same associative leaps—Woolf structurally equates them. The technique undermines the diagnostic divide that Dr. Bradshaw would impose: a respectable hostess's inner life is as fractured and fluid as a shell-shocked soldier's, and both resist the fixed categories of "sane" and "insane." Woolf's stream of consciousness is therefore not a neutral psychological tool but a critical instrument that maps the shared fluidity of all minds, challenging a society that insists on rigid, gendered, and pathologizing distinctions.

5. Freudian Influences and Cultural Context

Although Woolf never openly supported psychoanalysis, her Hogarth Press published the works of Freud in English, and the terms of repression and the unconscious are rife in Mrs. Dalloway at the level of narrative structure. The hallucinatory cry of Septimus—"Evans, Evans! Functions as a textbook-like rebound of the repressed: the dead comrade, the repressed forced to the surface by the traumatic shock, breaks into consciousness, uniting the battlefield with Bond Street until Septimus can no longer commit the present versus the past²⁸. By his delusion that trees are not inanimate objects but are alive with meaning and are not under rational control, he literalizes the Freudian concept of the unconscious speaking through symbols and not being under rational control. Meanwhile, Clarissa represents as a social practice the repression of genuine desire: the endless party-planning is a kind of psychic defence mechanism, transferring existential dread into flower arrangements and evening dresses, the symptoms of a battle between genuine desire and the requirements of respectable femininity²⁹.

6. Critics' Perspectives

Scholars such as Briggs contextualize Woolf's psychological acuity in terms of modernist interest in interiority. The stresses in *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* that Woolf's talent for "mapping the mind's hidden recesses" merges James's fluid consciousness and implicit Freudian subtext³⁰. Yet Woolf's methodology is distinct; her emphasis upon sympathy and interhuman experience evades clinical reductionism. The diagnostic explanation for Clarissa's sympathetic response to Septimus's suicide will remain unexplained because it requires a complete comprehension of mental distress.

Woolf developed modernist psychology through James's work and Freudian concepts which reshaped literary depictions of mental processes. Through her combination of stream-of-consciousness storytelling with precise emotional maps she created a new way to show mental complexity while avoiding traditional social and medical restrictions.

7. The Novel as a Psychological Map of Interconnected Minds

The psychological map of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) shows how characters' inner lives connect through their mental processes which affect and mirror each other. According to Molly Hite in her research on narrative subjectivity the story structure eliminates character distinctions to create a unified consciousness that represents the fragmented yet connected nature of human experience.³¹ Woolf approves this as the following terms:

A. Fluid Narrative Techniques:

- 1) **Stream of Consciousness:** Woolf presents readers with unfiltered character thoughts which include Clarissa's observations about aging ("She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged") and Septimus's delusory visions of "trees alive with voices". The narrative sections merge seamlessly into each other through a continuous stream which reveals shared emotional currents.
- 2) **Free Indirect Discourse:** The narrator seamlessly moves between character perspectives which creates a seamless transition between individual and collective mental states. The narrator adopts Peter Walsh's critical assessment of Clarissa by calling her a snob to show how social judgments affect human connections³².

B. Shared Motifs and Symbols:

- 1) Big Ben's constant ringing sound unites people across London while it shows their hidden anxieties through its time-keeping function. The clock's chimes create a shared moment for Clarissa and Septimus and other characters who stop what they are doing to face their existential dread or nostalgic feelings.
- 2) Trauma and Isolation: Septimus's suicide echoes through Clarissa's mind even though they never encounter each other. Her sympathetic identification ("She felt somehow very like him") implies an implicit solidarity between their misfortunes.

8. Molly Hite's Analysis of Interconnected Subjectivity:

Email: djhr@uodiyala.edu.iq

Woolf creates a "web of consciousness" through her narrative which shows how characters' mental processes connect like different threads in a network. The way Rezia mourns Septimus's mental decline mirrors Clarissa's fear of becoming invisible in society because both characters experience the same feeling of being alone. Hite explains that Woolf uses a non-linear storytelling approach to create a "collage of subjectivities" which focuses on the shared weaknesses of human nature³³.

Woolf uses mind mapping to show how society becomes fragmented according to her critique. The novel opposes Dr. Bradshaw's rigid definition of "proportion" because it fails to capture the dynamic nature of human psychology which reveals the harm that results from simplifying complex human nature into fixed categories³⁴. The novel presents a plea for empathy because mental health problems affect people deeply yet most people can understand their experiences.

A. Interiority vs. Exteriority in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Public Facades and Private Turmoil

Virginia Woolf presents in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) the struggle between personal emotions and social expectations through the character of Clarissa Dalloway who hides her deep inner turmoil behind her dazzling social events. The post-World War I period according to scholar David Bradshaw created a social conflict between people's need to present themselves well and their hidden emotional fragility³⁵.

B. Clarissa Dalloway: The Hostess as a Mask

The extravagant parties hosted by Clarissa represent how conventional normalcy exists in a society that is divided. People who do not know her view Clarissa as an ideal upper-class hostess because she shows perfect social skills and remains calm and charming at all times. Her inner thoughts reveal both deep emotional suffering and suppressed emotions as:

- 1) *"She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged"*³⁶.
- 2) *Her reflections on lost opportunities ("If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy") hint at unfulfilled desires*³⁷.

Bradshaw (2003) explains that Clarissa uses her parties as a stage for social conformity because she uses her hostess position to avoid feeling useless. People in post-war Britain needed to conceal their hidden suffering by following social customs because the society enforced them to maintain appearances.

C. Septimus Warren Smith: Exteriorizing Trauma

Septimus shows his post-traumatic stress through hallucinations and erratic behavior but Clarissa keeps her inner conflict private. Society fails to recognize his suffering so it labels his condition as a mental illness. The doctor Bradshaw identifies Septimus's condition as "lack of proportion" because people during that time period refused to recognize mental illness as an uncontrollable state of mind

³⁸. Bradshaw (2003) notes that society displays Septimus's external "madness" for public viewing but fails to recognize Clarissa's internal struggles. The two characters exist in different social environments yet they face identical social constraints because one tries to hide their true self while the other remains silent.

D. Woolf's Critique of Post-WWI Society

The author uses this opposition to show how society values artificial peace instead of genuine emotional truth. The stream-of-consciousness narrative technique in the novel reveals the deep gap between what people show to the world and their actual inner lives:

- 1) *Big Ben's chimes symbolize rigid societal time, clashing with characters' fluid inner lives.*
- 2) *Windows and mirrors recur as motifs, reflecting the divide between how characters see themselves and how they are seen.*

David Bradshaw explains that Woolf uses her writing to show how society faces psychological damage because it refuses to address its internal pain. The party at Clarissa's house functions as a small representation of society which will lead to her emotional response when Septimus takes his life because she understands his inner truth.

Woolf uses Clarissa's concealed suffering against Septimus's visible pain to demonstrate how society forces people to hide their true selves. Bradshaw (2003) explains that the public self-functions as a prison which forces people to maintain artificial personas that block their human nature. The novel reveals that every person hides an unknown reality which remains hidden behind their social facade.

E. Perception and Subjectivity in Mrs. Dalloway: Time and Memory

The time structure in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (1925) combines strict chronological order with personal memory experiences that create a non-traditional understanding of time according to Henri Bergson's philosophical ideas. Bergson established two separate time concepts in his work: clock time (temps) which refers to mechanical time measurement through devices like Big Ben's clock and duration (durée) which represents the subjective psychological experience of time through memory and emotional processes ³⁹. The narrative in Mrs. Dalloway repeats this dichotomy, viewing how characters' minds resist linear time, creating profound psychological repercussions.

F. Fluidity of Time: Big Ben vs. Subjective Experience

Big Ben struggle in the novel punctuates the marking of the passage of clock time:

- 1) *"First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable"* ⁴⁰.

Also, characters like Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith inhabit a Bergsonian *durée*, where past and present merge:

Clarissa's Memories: Clarissa spends her time preparing for her party while she recalls her Bourton days when she experienced "a match burning in a crocus". The present moment gets interrupted by her memories which demonstrate how different life experiences throughout time create her identity.

Septimus's Trauma: The war memories he holds create a never-ending nightmare which merges past and present through his repeated cry of "Evans, Evans!" The Bergsonian concept of *durée* has become for him a prison that continues to inflict his unresolved war wounds.

Bergsonian Philosophy in Woolf's Narrative

Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique captures Bergson's concept of *durée*, eschewing chronological plots in favor of psychological realism. To illustrate, Peter Walsh's stroll through London provokes disjointed memories about his former passion for Clarissa, collapsing decades into moments:

2) *"He could see her now... laughing at some joke"*⁴¹.

Some Scholar contends that Woolf's vision of fluid time expresses Bergson's assertion that "time is invention or it is nothing at all". In placing inner experience above all else, Woolf criticizes a productive, order-fixated society, post-WWI Britain hanging onto order in an era of disorder⁴².

Clarissa: Her fluid sense of time permits her to note beauty in fleeting moments ("the ebb and flow of life"), so it also evokes existential dread: "She feared time itself... dwindling her life".

Septimus: His fractured sense of time mirrors the psychological cost of conflict. Being incapable of mediating between past suffering and present, he seeks refuge in death from time entrapment.

Woolf's handling of time in Mrs. Dalloway follows Bergson's theories, laying bare the conflict between social obligations toward order for its own sake and the chaotic nature of human consciousness. By collapsing distinctions between past and present, she reveals how memory constructs identity and mental well-being, calling for sympathy for people stuck within their *durée*.

G. Fragmented Reality in Mrs. Dalloway: Divergent Perceptions and the Critique of Societal Normality

Virginia the conflicting perspectives of two characters who observe the same events which challenges social beliefs about normal behavior. Through Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith Woolf presents two narrative opposites who experience life Woolf uses Mrs. Dalloway (1925) to show how people experience reality differently through differently to challenge the restrictive social norms of post-World War I England as described in Rachel Bowlby's *Feminist Destinations* (1997).

Woolf uses disjointed viewpoints to picture the subjectivity of reality. For instance:

1. The Car Backfiring:

Clarissa notices the sound as a mundane interruption: “a pistol shot in the street outside”⁴³. To her, it’s a momentary distraction from party preparations.

Septimus responds with terror, rendering it a wartime trigger: “The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?”⁴⁴. His trauma fractures his reality, blending past and present.

2. The Skywriting Plane:

Clarissa sees the plane as a symbol of postwar modernity and wonder: “They looked up; the sound faded... the word ‘TOFFEE’ curled in the sky”.

Septimus interprets it as a coded message, reflecting his delusional paranoia: “They are signaling to me... something terrible is about to happen”⁴⁵.

These experiences highlight how events in the world outside oneself are perceived through the lens of personal trauma and social roles, thereby undermining the understanding of a single, objective reality.

Critique of Societal “Normality” vs. Individual Subjectivity

Woolf contrasts societal demands for conformity with the messy reality of inner lives:

Clarissa’s Performance: Existential anxiety is behind her role as hostess. She holds onto social conventions (“giving parties to cover the silence”) because she cannot bear her fear of being irrelevant. Women like Clarissa are in “prescribed femininity” and have no choice but to perform joy while their inner lives go unaddressed⁴⁶.

Septimus’s Marginalization: His symptoms of PTSD (hallucinations, numbness) conflict with societal conceptions about stoic masculinity. Dr. Bradshaw's diagnosis for “lack of proportion” pathologizes his trauma, valuing societal order over compassion⁴⁷.

The stream-of-consciousness technique represents fragmented subjectivity. For example:

- 1) Clarissa’s thoughts hesitate between the past (Bourton memories) and the present (party anxieties), exemplifying her fractured identity.
- 2) Septimus’s disjointed visions (“trees alive with meaning”) mirror his shattered psyche, resisting linear, “sane” narratives.

Bowlby understands that such fragmentation is a feminist deconstruction: Woolf eschews patriarchal ideals that marginalize women's (and veterans') interiority as illogical, validating instead subjective truths.

Fragmenting reality reveals the violence involved in imposing normativity upon people. Clarissa's late sympathy for Septimus (“She felt somehow very like him”) unites their solitary worlds, indicating an alliance between marginal subjectivities. The asserting on that Woolf’s writing calls for society's acceptance

of multiplicity, where "normality" would be redefined to cover all human experience⁴⁸.

Conclusion:

This paper suggests that the formal innovations in Mrs. Dalloway, i.e., stream-of-consciousness narration, Bergsonian temporality, and Freudian subtext, do not just give expression to mental distress, but also, structurally speaking, denature diagnostic categories and gendered norms that defined inter-war psychiatry. The analysis shows that by equating the suffering of the female with that of the shell-shocked soldier, which the medical discourse dictated to women, Woolf created a narration method that equated their suffering. The main contribution of the paper is this integration of feminist historical writing of psychiatry with continuing formal analysis: it demonstrates that the technique of Woolf is not an impartial psychological instrument but a critical one that maps common areas of vulnerability, challenges the coercive form of proportion as proposed by Dr. Bradshaw, and models empathy as an alternative to pantheonization. Finally, Mrs. Dalloway turn out to be a literary intervention into the politics of mental health whose insistence on interconnected interiority is all too urgently relevant to the contemporary debate about care, stigma, and the limits of institutional power.

Notes: |

¹ Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. Vintage, 1996.p.11.

² Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Hogarth Press, 1925.p.25.

³ Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." *The Common Reader*, Harcourt, 1984, pp. 146-54.

⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Hogarth Press, 1925.p.29.

⁵ Woolf, Virginia. *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell, vol. 3, Harcourt, 1985.p.72.

⁶ Caramagno, Thomas C. *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness*. University of California Press, 1992.

⁷ Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. Pantheon Books, 1977.

⁸ Winter, J. M. *The Experience of World War I*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁹ Showalter, p.22.

¹⁰ Caramagno, p.12.

¹¹ Woolf, p.114.

¹² Woolf, p.164.

¹³ Showalter, p.145.

¹⁴ Woolf, p.89.

¹⁵ Winter, p.212.

¹⁶ Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.

¹⁷ Woolf, p.127.

¹⁸ Showalter, p.45.

¹⁹ Woolf, p.114.

²⁰ Ibid. p.128.

²¹ Ibid. p.165.

- ²² Barker, Philip. *The Mighty Walzer*. Hamish Hamilton, 2010.
- ²³ Lee, p.9.
- ²⁴ Woolf, p.312.
- ²⁵ Woolf, p.3.
- ²⁶ Briggs, Julia. *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*. Harcourt, 2005, p.87.
- ²⁷ Briggs, p.88.
- ²⁸ Woolf, p.26.
- ²⁹ Briggs, p.153.
- ³⁰ Ibid, p.92.
- ³¹ Hite, Molly. "Woolf's Geometries of Modern Subjectivity." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Sellers, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 109-30.
- ³² Woolf, p.94.
- ³³ Hite, p.112.
- ³⁴ Woolf, p.127.
- ³⁵ Bradshaw, David. Introduction. *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. vii-xxxiii.
- ³⁶ Woolf, p.8.
- ³⁷ Woolf, p.53.
- ³⁸ Ibid, p.128.
- ³⁹ Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by F. L. Pogson, George Allen & Unwin, 1910. Originally published as *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889.
- ⁴⁰ Woolf, p.4.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. 56.
- ⁴² Banfield, Ann. *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.p.88.
- ⁴³ Woolf, p.16.
- ⁴⁴ Woolf, p.18.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. 31.
- ⁴⁶ Bowlby, Rachel. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh University Press, 1997.p.89.
- ⁴⁷ Woolf, p.126.
- ⁴⁸ Bowlby, p.136.

References:

- Banfield, Ann. *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Barker, Philip. *The Mighty Walzer*. Hamish Hamilton, 2010.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by F. L. Pogson, George Allen & Unwin, 1910. Originally published as *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- Bradshaw, David. Introduction. *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Briggs, Julia. *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*. Harcourt, 2005.

-
- Caramagno, Thomas C. *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness*. University of California Press, 1992.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Hite, Molly. "Woolf's Geometries of Modern Subjectivity." *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Sellers, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. Vintage, 1996.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. Pantheon Books, 1977.
- Winter, J. M. *The Experience of World War I*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." *The Common Reader*, Harcourt, 1984.
- _____. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Hogarth Press, 1925.
- _____. *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell, vol. 3, Harcourt, 1985.