

**TIME, SPACE AND MEMORY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY****Ms. Maleeha Wasay**Scholar, M.A. English Literature (Previous), Sophia Girls' College (Autonomous), Ajmer  
E-mail: maleehawasay0785@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

*Mrs. Dalloway, by Virginia Woolf, is often talked about for being set within twenty-four hours and for the extremely impactful use of stream of consciousness technique; the latter being a technique Woolf was known for. Mrs. Dalloway is one of the best works of the writer, but despite of a lot of focus on the time and space in this unique novel, there can be seen a lack of focus on the impact of war on memory, the changing time and space, but an ever-present atmosphere of fear, of the belief that something sinister would take place. Which can be seen as an impact of the World War- I, on the fictional Mrs. Dalloway and the world she lives in. The novel tends to focus on the fragmented inner state of people, along with the hollowness of the post-war world. This hollowness is rather apparent in the triggers the supposedly mundane acts- such as opening a French window- can create, drawing the character back into her youth while creating parallels with the present. Mrs. Dalloway, goes around London, preparing for her party, but this act is also not alienated, from the memories of her past life. This paper intends to deal with such triggers, and elaborate upon time, space and memory in Mrs. Dalloway with reference to the impact of war, on the world of Mrs. Dalloway; with its shifting space and constant fear and suffocation.*

**Keywords:** Clarissa Dalloway, memory, past and present, Septimus Warren Smith, space, time, war.

*Mrs. Dalloway* begins, with Clarissa Dalloway preparing for her party. Thus, begins a quest to find stability in the ever-changing post-war world. The novel is set in London of the mid-twenties. Published in 1925, *Mrs. Dalloway* highlights the trials and tribulations of a life in London post war. "For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven-over. It was June" (Woolf, Pg 11). *Mrs. Dalloway* deals with bleak atmosphere of the war, while describing the changing attitude of people, including, Septimus Warren Smith, a veteran of the First World War, who is suffering from shell shock and hallucinations.

The characters in the world of *Mrs. Dalloway* are united by time at present; which is indicated through the sound of the Big Ben. The sound not only unites the characters of the novel, but also offers a stability to the novel, in which space shifts constantly with one or the other character thinking about his/her life and associating his/her surroundings with the past, it is through the sound of the Big Ben that the readers are connected to the ground-level, day to day workings of people in the

novel. This sound, at the same time, separates one part of the novel with another; almost like chapters. Apart from this, the novel also brings to light the changing responses of people that are rather apparent through the way Clarissa and Septimus respond to their surroundings. The world of *Mrs. Dalloway* constantly shifts with regards to time and space through how different people across London respond to their environment such as the car explosion, on the road or the aeroplane, passing over head, all the while being connected- as if caught in a web- with their shared experiences. However, it is the peculiarity of these responses that brings out the damaging effects of war on the lives of people. Woolf tactfully uses memory to connect her characters, such as; Clarissa's response to the car, highlights the trauma the war has given to common people and the intensity with which they fear the mere prospect of war. "-oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!" (Woolf, Pg 20). Soon after this abrupt response of Clarissa, the character of Septimus is introduced, creating a sort of parallel between Clarissa and Septimus, connecting them with each other at specific moments in the narrative; never meeting but intimately linked together, through the suffocation they feel in their lives, despite the diverse situations they live in. All the characters in the novel are preoccupied by one or the other problems in their lives. The world of

Mrs. Dalloway, has an ever-present feeling of anxiety as if the characters are trapped in the lives they live, with an impossible yet increasing desire to break free from their surroundings, memories and lives. It through Septimus and his hallucinations that the effect of World War I on mind and memory is most apparent. Septimus and the world he has created in his mind is constantly shifting and threatening to get destroyed, suddenly. His hallucination that the world is bursting into flames can be seen as an equivalent of the bomb blasts that were common in war, where cities were destroyed abruptly with, countless deaths; where the world shook and the horrors of war came to the surface. "And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames" (Woolf, Pg 21). It is not the reaction of just these two characters but also the reaction of the general public after the car has passed that gives a glimpse of the emotional state of people "Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fulness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" (Woolf, Pg 24). It is in such moments that the emotional damage caused by war is brought to light through the memories such moments bring to surface, creating a rather sardonic parallel between the past and the present. The idea of death in war is dealt with a nuanced subtlety by Woolf through the use of stream of consciousness technique. These instances are treated as triggers that draw people back, to the horrors of war.

The war has left its mark on the women as well, which is rather apparent through the isolation of Lucrezia Warren Smith; Septimus' wife, goes through after her husband is exposed to trauma in war and turns mad, "It was she who suffered- but she had nobody to tell" (Woolf, Pg 30). Lucrezia's desolate life is a symbol of the peaceful, well maintained, routine domestic life of people, primarily women, that was destroyed as a result of war. It is through her that the turbulent and ever-changing lives of the wives of war veterans, is

brought to light by Woolf. Lucrezia and her turbulent life constantly reminds the readers of the suffering of the dead and also of the suffering of the living; who were left behind with the memories of the dead through constant reminders of a better past that these instances are connected to. "She must go back and tell him, go back to him sitting there on the green chair under the tree, talking to himself, or to that dead man Evans, whom she had only seen for a moment in the shop. He had seemed a nice quiet man; a great friend of Septimus's, and he had been killed in the War. But such things happen to every one. Every one has friends who were killed in war" (Woolf, Pg 74). Lucrezia in her self-contemplation finds Septimus; in his present state, a cause for her suffering and consequently refers to his state as something wherein, he is capable of choosing happiness. All the while, remembering the time before their marriage wherein, she was her happiest and most contented self. For her, Septimus should not have been the way he is especially, since, what he has gone through is nothing exceptional. It is in lines like these, that the extent of these deplorable conditions is brought to light. Septimus and his hallucinations could be best understood through her character. "He saw things too- he had seen an old woman's head in the middle of a fern. Yet he could be happy when he chose" (Woolf, Pg 74). Septimus' hallucinations are often about death, violence, whispering people and the one that stands out the most is his hallucination about Evans, who came back from the dead unwounded. It is in this hallucination that one can trace a similar idea like that of Wilfred Owen's *The Soldier*, where the first soldier sees death as peace, and tranquility. Septimus too, visualized Evans as a perfectly well, unharmed and unwounded being. Which is a rather common image used by writers to show that the intensity of the damage war brought to the lives of people is such that death pales in comparison and appears to be rather peaceful. It is in the use of this image that Woolf brings out the extent of damage Septimus' mind has gone through because of the war. Here, the reader realises that Septimus finds the idea of death rather comforting and is therefore, keen on killing himself. Here, one can find a hint that Septimus might actually kill himself to remove the invisible and incomprehensible wounds that the war has given him, both mentally and emotionally. "There they waited till the war was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself- "For God's sake don't come!"

Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead. But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed” (Woolf, Pg 78). It is in these instances that Septimus finds himself the most helpless, when no one can understand him and he is left alone with the imaginary Evans as his only companion.

This could also be seen as a state reminiscent of his situation in the war, where he was all alone and all that he saw and went through, rendered him speechless in an unexplainable, unfeeling way. He was changed, almost altered by war, positively at first, but later reduced to a deranged, phantom like existence. “Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by the name” (Woolf, Pg 95). The war had resulted in Septimus creating a space in his mind in which he could neither share his thoughts, emotions and ideas with anyone, nor could he let anyone in. It is this isolated state of mind that causes Septimus to constantly blend his past and present, bringing in the two worlds together. In his mind the war has left him incapable of feeling anything and it is this incapability that further deteriorates his mental condition, to the extent where even Evans dying, means nothing to him. “when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (Woolf, Pg 96). Consequently, Septimus cannot be understood by anyone, even, Dr. Holmes; he was like an outcast, left aside in this altered world, isolated and solitary, almost divine in his misery. “But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world” (Woolf, Pg 102). Clarissa’s husband, Richard Dalloway is also grateful and rather happy about the life he is living, due to the destruction, uncertainty and fear war brought in the lives of people. War has left a positive impact on his mind, where looking back in time, he is grateful to have survived it all. “Why

not? Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle” (Woolf, Pg 125). War has resulted in Richard Dalloway, comparing his life with the ones who died in war. This comparison brings with it an elysian touch to his surroundings, where he is perfectly contented with whatever he has in life.

However, it is the character of Miss Kilman who in her ugliness and poverty is left with a sense of lack of belongingness due to the circumstances war brought to light, in her life. “Miss Dolby thought she would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans. She had had to go. It was true that the family was of German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman in the eighteenth century; but her brother had been killed. They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains- when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany!” (Woolf, Pg 134) It is due to these circumstances that Miss Kilman clings on to Clarissa’s daughter; Elizabeth and tries to belong to the world in which she just does not fit in. It is this utter lack of belongingness that results in Miss Kilman’s deep contempt for Clarissa and women like her, who simply belong to the world, armed with their beauty, money, social status and utter lack of knowledge about the current state of the world. Miss Kilman is someone who is knowledgeable yet unacceptable in the world of Mrs. Dalloway. Which is symbolic of the ideologies that the war rejected and the state of mind it created among the people, where acceptance is everything. ““Why should they ask me?” she said. “I’m plain, I’m unhappy.” She knew it was idiotic. But it was all those people passing-people with parcels who despised her, who made her say it” (Woolf, Pg 143). It is through this character that Woolf brings out a state of mind of people where validation is vital to both the heart and the mind, where something as trivial as Elizabeth wanting to go home, triggers panic and disappointment in Miss Kilman, where every act of people around her leaves her feeling slighted and the environment around her brings out the memories she had buried deep inside her mind. “Don’t quite forget me,” said Doris Kilman; her voice quivered. Right away to the end of the field the dumb creature galloped in terror” (Woolf, Pg 144).

However, Woolf's description of Septimus and his plight of not being understood, reaches its extreme when Sir William Bradshaw also fails to understand him and tells Lucrezia that he is to be shifted, separated and isolated from her. Septimus, who is suffering from shell shock asks Lucrezia to sketch out his visions, but these too are a laughing matter for the rest of the 'sane' world. "And once they found the girl who did the room reading one of these papers in fits of laughter. It was a dreadful pity. For that made Septimus cry out about human cruelty- how they tear each other to pieces" (Woolf, Pg 152). Septimus' association of human nature and cruelty in his mind is probably because of his memories of the war, where humans did tear each other into pieces. That is probably an explanation of him associating Dr. Holmes with human nature as well. As this cruel and domineering nature has failed to understand him. "for Dr. Holmes seemed to stand for something horrible to him. "Human nature," he called him" (Woolf Pg 152). Septimus' hallucinations that he is falling down into flames is also representative of bombings, killings and the hellish atmosphere of the trenches during the war. "And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames!" (Woolf, Pg 152).

Woolf gives the readers a description of Septimus' hallucinations by presenting the diagrams Lucrezia drew for him, each of which is representative of human suffering. Where women and children use arms, people or the world circles around money, people roped in together in misery, like inanimate objects, a sea of nameless faces, laughing from the waves of misery. There is something of a dreadful solemnness in these designs. These pictures explicitly state how unhinged Septimus is, all of which is a consequence of the war. In Septimus, mind he did not want to lose to people like Holmes and Bradshaw and thus, he jumps out of the window and kills himself to save himself from

Holmes. "They looked at them together. Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings- were they?- on their backs; circles traced around shillings and sixpences- the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world" (Woolf, Pg 159).

It is however, Clarissa's response on Septimus' death- the circumstances of which she got to know through Lady Bradshaw; in her party- that connects the two characters the most. Clarissa found something relatable, almost peaceful in Septimus' death. "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (Woolf, Pg 198). There is a certain similarity, some point of interconnectedness that Clarissa feels with Septimus, which makes her serenely glad of his death. "She felt somehow very like him- the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away" (Woolf, Pg 200). The importance of time in the novel is rather apparent considering the working title of the novel was 'The Hours' but it is through space, the Big Ben and the memories and associations of the characters with each other that the whole novel is connected.

It is in this interconnectedness that one finds the traces of impact of war and the sad reality of the world of *Mrs. Dalloway* almost sentimental. One of Woolf's experimental novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* brings to light the workings of the mind and psychological disorders, by making them more natural, humane and rather pitiful. While a modern reader is more open to the themes *Mrs. Dalloway* deals with, Woolf's approach and attempt can create pathos in the hearts of most readers, making the novel the best of its kind.

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