

Mrs. dalloway's concept of time



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Virginia Woolf grants us an access to a new concept of time in "Mrs. Dalloway", through which temporality-moment is investigated in two contradictory ways: one is continuous, deadly, dissolving while the other is placid, immortal, infinite; hence the combination of them has created a new type of temporality - androgynous time.

The deadly and dissolving moment, belonging to physical time, is fully represented through the Big Ben clock. The Big Ben clock, with its appearance throughout the novel, reminds people the time of the real world, the past that will never return "Big Ben struck the half hour"(Mrs. Dalloway, 119). And moments are like "leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 2). For every moment appears from nothing then just disappears to nothing, leaving no traces (Kuhlken, p357), ceaselessly, like a raindrop diminishes when coincides with the ground, it does not seem so significant. However that insignificance is significant to everybody, including Clarissa, for every moment is attributed to their death. If even moment can disappear, then "did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely[?]", thought Clarissa (Woolf, p. 6). The disappearance of moment represents Clarissa's own disappearance, for time can never return, and so is she.

In contrast to clock's time is mind's time, with its temporality placid, immortal, infinite as seen in the party Clarissa organizes. As in Kuhlken's approach, the party is demonstrated as a veneer, hiding clock's time behind the posture of mind's time, and the guests are gradually dying (356); nonetheless, the party's meaning to Clarissa makes it irrelevant. To Clarissa, a party is a revolt to physical time's authority, as it denotes a moment, freezes the leaden circle or the raindrop and extends it to the infinity. She is

not under the uniformity of clock's time, therefore, has absolute authority in the party. Consequently, she obtains true freedom and true self, as she said "every one [is] unreal in one way, much more real in another" (160) - "unreal" because she and everyone are not in the same space-time anymore, and "much more real" because that space-time is her own space-time, where her internal self is shown.

But then such moment cannot last forever, for clock's time will not stop flowing. That special moment collapses as Clarissa heard about Septimus's death. Death - the representation of the cruelty of clock's time, as in Clarissa and Cleo Enduree suicidal time, "[threatens] every act that is creative and alive" (Kuhlken, 344). Though death has undeniably robbed off her momentary freedom, it is also the catalyst that enables Clarissa to combine two contradictory temporalities into one, attaining a new space-time, a new life with each moment being special - androgynous time. As life only exists because death exists, and only through death can one become alive again.

That androgynous time, the combination of two contradictory types of time, is experienced by Mrs. Dalloway through a special event: encountering Septimus's death right in the middle of the party, in her own space-time. Though first restrained by the clock's intrusion: "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?" (172), she then comprehends him, somehow sees herself in Septimus and therefore experiences his death. In the conjunction between her own space-time - the party and the clock's space-time - the old woman next door and the Big Ben Clock, Clarissa stands by the window - the border between two worlds, with the assistance of death, absorbs both types of time. The Big Ben Clock is still striking but it

cannot impact on her, because the realm accommodates her now is not under physical time's authority. Kuhlken describes this realm as "post-denouement, off-page, off-screen", but such explanation is rather vague, for mind's time can also be described "off-screen" to clock's time, as there is no universal time for the universe (Space-time, p39). Instead of being segregated from physical time, androgynous time blends with it, creates a new space-time right in the realm of physical time and mental time. This type of time is still continuous, but every moment is not the same. The moment - raindrop falls to the ground, instead of diminishing, contributes to a changing, continuous stream, in which every raindrop is immortal and infinite, therefore, important. Consequently, Clarissa is vitalized in every moment, knowing that the past, now and future does not matter. She is reborn.

Through Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway", the concept of time is interpreted validly. Starting from just two opposite types of time: physical time and mental time, through Clarissa's one-in-a-lifetime encounter, the readers are somewhat exposed to a new space-time: the androgynous time in which freedom of consciousness is available.

WORK CITED: 1. Virginia Woolf "Mrs. Dalloway"

2. Pam Fox Kuhlken "Clarissa and Cleo (En)Duree Suicidal Time in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Agnes Varda's Cleo De 5 A 7"

3. Russel "Space-time"