

THE LANGUAGE OF TIME IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FICTION: MRS. DALLOWAY, ORLANDO AND THE WAVES

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine how language is depicted as a characteristic of modern literature in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, Orlando and The Waves by means of describing the aspect of time, both objective and subjective.

The idea of the novel as "a direct impression of life" comes from Henry James, implying a filtering of experience through an individual sensibility (29). Regarding modern novels, the modern subject was the nature of man and the growth of human consciousness. That represented the main form of writing in the modern tradition, a form that was dependent upon sensibility.

Narrative in the modernist novel typically follows the passage of time as it is experienced within the minds of its characters, rather than the straightforwardly forward-moving plot of standard realism. Time is conceptualized as an ordered arrangement of defined events, rather than as an endless flow of experience in an indivisible continuity. The intellect analyzes time as having measurable duration, but, according to Henry Bergson (1859-1941), the flow of real time can only be known by intuition.

Time appears on various levels as the different characters in turn recall the past or look towards the future, and often the only unifying element among these people is the moment of time which brings them together. In her novels, Virginia Woolf uses the striking of a clock to denote both the hours of an actual day and the shift from one figure to another and the consequent change in her system of time.

Clocks and time take on a life of their own in Mrs. Dalloway, and their way of marking time stands in contrast to the characters' experiences of time, particularly in their relation to memory. The "one-day" structure of the novel also reveals the exploration of an ordinary mind in an ordinary day. For instance, mental time does not progress steadily forward, like the clock time. This aspect is illustrated by the protagonist of the novel, Clarissa Dalloway's arrival at the flower shop in the morning. The present time is expressed by the moment when Clarissa Dalloway sees the flowers, which brings her back to memories and sensations from her past. Therefore, her novel becomes a modality of retracing life, of experimenting, of exploring time, space, memory and consciousness, the concept of self, whether private or public with an impact on the creation of identity.

Virginia Woolf's characters of Orlando provide an example for the distinction between interior and the exterior time. There is often a dissimilarity between the short time that passes in the fictional world and its correspondent in the characters' minds, as they are able to recall memories from various periods of time, or they are even able to transcend through time, as it will happen with the main protagonist in Orlando. Living to be approximately three hundred and fifty years, Orlando, the main protagonist of the novel with the same name, becomes a literary symbol of the continuity of each individual and the representation of a fictional character able to transcend temporality and to win the battle with external time, measured by the clock.

The inner consciousness "voyage" is expressed in Woolf's novel, The Waves as it takes the form of a portrait representing the interlaced lives of six friends: Bernard, Neville, Louis,

Jinny, Susan, and Rhoda. The novel is divided into nine sections, each of which corresponds to a time of day, and, symbolically, to a period in the lives of the characters. Also, the fragmentation of the self is suggested in the unusual form of the novel, which consists of the soliloquies of 6 characters which express their inner experience with little or no reference to the external events that would constitute the plot. In the novel mentioned, the characters are constructed both by their own voice and by all the other one's voices, as they describe one another in the course of the book.

All in all, one might consider that Virginia Woolf's novels represents the continuity of both time and individual existence in contrast with the segments of chronological time as measured by an inflexible clock. For Virginia Woolf, the past and present flow together and are as one.

The main concern of the Modernist novel is the existential discovery of a deeper, mythical, more human self of identity. The exploration of a sensibility replaces the Victorian purpose of telling a story. The Modernist novel contains a story which may be elaborate and minimal, but it serves only as a vehicle for the exploration of sensibility on the part of the author, which helps the reader discover himself. The Modernist novel liberates the reader from the author's authority and gives him an autonomous condition, to shape the action and determine the meaning in his or her own mind.

The idea of the novel as "a direct impression of life" comes from Henry James, implying a filtering of experience through an individual sensibility (29). Regarding modern novels, the modern subject was the nature of man and the growth of human consciousness. That represented the main form of writing in the modern tradition, a form that was dependent upon sensibility.

Time plays a crucial meaning in modernist representations. The novelist's concern with time is a natural branch of the modern subject, a conscious awareness of the separateness and unity of events that give density and meaning to the pattern of experience. One of the key examples with which Henry Bergson expressed his theory of the fundamental incompatibility between the intuitive and rational self was the experience of time.

Time, as it is lived freely by the consciousness, is very different from time as the main figure of the clock and the calendar. Through subjective consciousness, time transforms into a continuum in which past and present melt into each other. Bergson calls this *la durée* or 'duration'. Duration involves the experience of continuous pure memory from an awareness of the present moment. The rational mind, however, can only comprehend time by organizing it into a linear sequence of measurable units, "spatialising" the 'real' time of duration into 'clock-time' (Parsons 112). For Bergson duration and clock time are not separate phenomena, because time only exists as duration. Bergson's theory of duration is simultaneously linked to his concept of memory. In *Matter and Memory* (1896; 1911), mirroring the distinction he makes between clock-time and real time, he argues that there are two kinds of memory: 'habit' memory, in which the mind consciously repeats to itself the scene of a previous event or experience, and 'pure' memory or 'contemplation', which is unconscious, imageless and only revealed in dreams or moments of intuition.

The temporal heterogeneity highlighted in the modern narrative finds its theoretical complement in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Conceptions of time and space, or chronotopes, Bakhtin emphasizes, are representative of literature; they not only define generic distinctions, but also determine the image of a person in literature as well. The novel makes the experience of real historical time perceivable through the chronotopes embodied in its characters, forms,

and languages; as new senses of the relation of time and space prevail historically, new forms arise to replace those that have literally become anachronistic.

According to Bergson, real time cannot be analyzed mathematically. To measure time is to try and create a break or disruption in time. In order to try and understand the flow of time, the intellect forms concepts of time as consisting of defined moments or intervals. But to try and intellectualize the experience of duration is to falsify it. Real duration can only be experienced by intuition. Time is conceptualized as an ordered arrangement of defined events, rather than as an endless flow of experience in an indivisible continuity. The intellect analyzes time as having measurable duration, but the flow of real time can only be known by intuition.

The main modern subject revealed in the modernist novels concerns the nature of man and the growth of human consciousness. Consciousness is a person's measurement for the nature and duration of time, as memory and history are its accumulation. The modern novelist is alert to that time sense which runs through all, giving awareness of the relations between fact and meaning, objects and ideas, outward appearance and inner reality; and he tries to make the form of the novel in order to correspond to his perception of reality.

The modern writer has followed the course of science in the discovery of new methods for ordering the element of time. It was Bergson who first pointed the direction away from the calendar sense in fiction, with his theory of the fluid nature of reality and his emphasis upon intuition rather than reason as a means of sensing its duration.

The novelist's concern with time is a natural outgrowth of the modern subject, a conscious awareness of the separateness and togetherness of events that give density and meaning to the pattern of experience. Also, the developments in the technique of the modern novel are those relating to the problem of time.

Virginia Woolf is concerned with two experiments—one with the characters of the novel and the other one with time. She does not trace the stream of consciousness as an end in itself, moreover, she suggests the distinction between clock time and time as it is recorded in the human mind. The form in which she creates her novels represents a poetic opening out of the inwardness of the narrative and a new voyage into consciousness. The outlines of the world in her novels are not fixed but are constantly merging into dreams or visions, while the outer world is dissolved by the intensity of emotions or deliberately set aside in favour of an inner world.

Time appears on various levels as the different characters in turn recall the past or look towards the future, and often the only unifying element among these people is the moment of time which brings them together. In her novels, Virginia Woolf uses the striking of a clock to denote both the hours of an actual day and the shift from one figure to another and the consequent change in her system of time.

According to Malcolm Bradbury, Woolf's sense of life was quite vivid, clear and subjective; it was a shift from mind to mind. The novelist's task was to dematerialize what was material, to make the novel as a self-creating species, "writing a composition as well as a decomposition" (Bradbury 181). The new method in writing a novel has the specific structure drawn from interior rather than historical time, this feature leading to the creation of the psychological and experimental novels.

In Woolf's vision, the modern novelist was free from the traditional views of time, identity and reality. The novel is able to manifest a new mode of perception by revealing the real spirit of life, which for Virginia Woolf was nothing but "a luminous halo" (Bradbury 184). For Virginia Woolf, consciousness is flowing among and above the characters that also share a common symbolic connection, such as the waves or the light-house.

Virginia Woolf is concerned with the immediacy of experience in time, with the complete experience of moment by moment and the change from one moment to another and with the relative action of time on diverse personalities. Her art is in the first place impressionistic; its aim is a vivid sense of present reality. The other marked influence on Virginia Woolf's novels comes from seventeenth-century English writers, such as Donne, Browne and Taylor.

Consciousness is constantly interposed between the world and the individual subject, creating a new kind of contemplation, mixing the sensitivities of art and form with intensity in the personal relationships of the characters, all these features representing the novelty of writing fiction.

The very act of writing represents at times an attempt to escape the real world, or at other times a sort of coming to terms with oneself, with the past, memories, longings, fears. To Virginia Woolf writing became a therapy, a modality of exploring the existential labyrinth, a disclosure of her inner states in the hope of finding a way to escape the labyrinth.

In her novels, consciousness is seen as the perceptual consciousness of the characters in the present moment, in a world where time is divisible into a series of isolated parts. For Virginia Woolf, consciousness represents a complex mixture between memory and perception, while time is expressed as the mixture between past and present.

Virginia Woolf views time as highly personal, subjective and variable, in contrast to the one measured by the clock, which represented the main concern of the traditionalist writers. She rebels against clock time's being imposed upon human beings since, for them, time based on observations of physical science is not natural. According to clock time, every day measures the same length and every hour contains exactly one twenty-fourth of this interval. This concept of time is expressed as a consequence in motion. Just as clock time is based on the repetition of a spatial nature, so time in the human mind increases from its repetitive nature, but on a personal level. Virginia Woolf's original interest is to express time as a flux.

Mrs. Dalloway, originally called *The Hours* is set over seventeen "chimed hours" (Bradbury 186) of one day in London in 1923.

For Virginia Woolf, London is meant to be a desirable place of writing, in which the echoes of Big Ben can be reflected in her fiction in order to express the link between the subconscious time and the mathematical one, measurable by the clock. As Laura Marcus points out, London becomes a "spectacle" that reveals Virginia Woolf's fascination towards the relation between the stream of consciousness and the city (Marcus 62).

Clocks and time take on a life of their own in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and their way of marking time stands in contrast to the characters' experiences of time, particularly in their relation to memory. The "one-day" structure of the novel also reveals the exploration of an ordinary mind in an ordinary day.

Virginia Woolf's technique of creating the novel contains the dissolution of traditional limits of plot and character, the breakup between the human mind and the world from the outside, her focus being on the apparently insignificant details about the external world.

Secondly, we should follow Bernard Blackstone's concept that describes Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, as an experiment with time. "It is a mingling of present experience and memory, for the most part in Mrs. Dalloway's mind" (71). Therefore, the emphasis is on the concept of time as a constant flow; this time is the present but also the past; it is linear and discontinuous.

Mental time does not progress steadily forward, like the clock time. This aspect is illustrated by Clarissa's arrival at the flower shop in the morning; her senses are taken to the evening time as she thinks:

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale—as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 13)

This passage exposes the idea of the interconnection between the past and the present. The present time is expressed by the moment when Clarissa Dalloway sees the flowers, which brings her back to memories and sensations from her past. Therefore, her novel becomes a modality of retracing life, of experimenting, of exploring time, space, memory and consciousness, the concept of self, whether private or public with an impact on the creation of identity.

As Laura Marcus suggests, Virginia Woolf uses the narrative “vehicles” (70) in order to explore the process of modernity, with its specific symbols- the motor care and the airplane:

The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologize came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery (...) The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street (*Mrs. Dalloway* 15-16)

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the car, as well as the airplane represent the forms of social organization, the state and commerce, with both connected and disrupted social consciousness and collective life. The car and those who are in it symbolize the state, the nation animated by the pedestrians, and a patriotic pride which the narrator reveals in its fluctuation. The emotions and feelings stirred by the “passing of greatness” are meant to create the image of the present seen from the perspective of the future, this present eventually becoming prehistoric:

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 stopping of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 20)

The sift of temporal perspective appointed in this paragraph suggests the representatives of power as chronologically misplaced, and all they stand for- England, The Empire, The Monarchy, the legacy of Victorianism and the denial of World War's consequences and the inevitable and unchangeable old form of order.

Clarissa Dalloway develops a linear sense of time that is her past, her present and her projection of the future. The ongoing of the time as it is passing by increases her fear of getting old, the agedness being compared with "the icy claws" that are threatening her youth, as she has just turned fifty two.

Through the use of the indirect discourse, the narrator reports the thoughts from the past and transposes them into present moments of the character's minds, as the basic form of narration. A relevant example is the section of the novel describing Peter Walsh's walk from Clarissa's house towards Regent's Park: "Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me, he thought. He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me." (*Mrs. Dalloway* 53-54)

While Big Ben reminds Clarissa of her oldness and her mortality, St. Margaret's serves another purpose. With St. Margaret's, Virginia Woolf presents a time that appeals more to the human spirit.

Ah, said St. Margaret's, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 54)

Time changes everything, whether it is the spiritual level, physical, historical or the social one. For Septimus Warren Smith, time is associated with death, with his memories that are connected with his experience during the war and his alienation.

"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 themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. 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. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 77)

Time flows in uninterrupted succession and it is incapable of being measured by the symbolical representations of hours, days, or months. A writer cannot refer accurately to such arbitrary divisions as past, present, and future; yet, through the use of memory, the individual is able to travel back and exist in the past before being swept along towards the future.

Virginia Woolf expressed the idea that time exists only within the individual, therefore she often chose experimental patterns of time for writing her novels, as it is the case of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Considered to be “the longest and most charming love letter in literature” (Goldman 65), and dedicated to her friend Vita Sackville-West, *Orlando*, the novel, is meant to represent a diversion after Virginia Woolf’s writing her experimental novels.

Virginia Woolf’s characters are revealed through the stream of consciousness technique, as it has been detailed and exemplified in the previous chapter. She uses this technique in a prolific manner, calling it a “tunneling” and describing it as being: “how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humor, depth. The idea is that the caves should connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment” (*A Writer’s Diary* 59).

Virginia Woolf’s characters provide an example for the distinction between interior and the exterior time. There is often a dissimilarity between the short time that passes in the fictional world and its correspondent in the characters’ minds, as they are able to recall memories from various periods of time, or they are even able to transcend through time, as it will happen with the main protagonist in *Orlando*.

Living to be approximately three hundred and fifty years, Orlando, the main protagonist of the novel with the same name, becomes a literary symbol of the continuity of each individual and the representation of a fictional character able to transcend temporality and to win the battle with external time, measured by the clock. The idea for such a novel came to Virginia Woolf after she read *Knole* and the Sackvilles, a family history of a good friend, Victoria Sackville-West. By creating one person, Orlando, who was to pass through the Elizabethan, Restoration, and Victorian Ages, Virginia Woolf illustrates continuity in a concrete manner by creating the figure of a hero in which time is dissolved.

The book follows Orlando from a young man during the Elizabethan Age to a woman in October, 1928, the “present time.” *Orlando* emphasizes a series of highlights which combine the individual being created by history, and carrying forward the past into the present.

Orlando, the writer, reflects upon the concept of time, through the use of the interior monologue, comparing letters with nature, while he enjoys his loneliness in concordance with it. Time seems to be suspended as everything follows its course in the nature, still, the protagonist is not able to anticipate what will happen to him, what he will become and how many years he will live:

Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces. The shade of green Orlando now saw spoilt his rhyme and split his metre. Moreover, nature has tricks of her own. Once look out of a window at bees among flowers, at a yawning dog, at the sun setting, once think 'how many more suns shall I see set' (...) Orlando naturally loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone. (*Orlando*10-11)

The idea of temporality as an entity that in the end will stop is connected with the ordinary people, the mortal ones, meanwhile Orlando, the poet, possessing a free and independent spirit, will become immortal: “Girls were roses, and their seasons were short as the flowers (...) He was young; he was boyish (...) he was no lover of garden flowers only; the wild and the weeds even had always a fascination for him.” (*Orlando* 16)

As times goes by, Orlando becomes a fictional character that transcends every notion of time and century, travelling around the world, knowing new people from different continents and eras. As a poet in love, time passed with difficulty as he no longer wanted to hide his feelings for the Russian Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch: “Indeed, as the days passed, Orlando took less and less care to hide his feelings.(...) Thus began an intimacy between the two which soon became the scandal of the Court. Soon it was observed Orlando paid the Muscovite far more attention than mere civility demanded” (*Orlando* 24-25). But time keeps its own course without affecting Orlando while he was making plans to live with the Russian Princess: “Time went by, and Orlando, wrapped in his own dreams, thought only of the pleasures of life; of his jewel; of her rarity; of means for making her irrevocably and indissolubly his own”(Orlando 29).

Orlando is able to transcend time without any obvious changes on his physical aspect, when he is sent to Constantinople: “Orlando’s day was passed, it would seem, somewhat in this fashion. About seven, he would rise, wrap himself in a long Turkish cloak, light a cheroot, and lean his elbows on the parapet”. (*Orlando* 71)

In Virginia Woolf’s novel, time produces changes in the aspect of the human being sex, because Orlando becomes a woman, without having its manners and personality affected: “Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath (...) Orlando had become a woman- there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been.” (*Orlando* 83) Further on, we are facing with the female representation of Orlando. Lady Orlando, did not seem to be mesmerized by the change of her sex: “Young, noble, beautiful, she had woken to find herself in a position than which we can conceive none more delicate for a young lady of rank.” (*Orlando* 84) Though, she was proud and happy of the change of hers ex: ““Praise God that I’m a woman!” she cried, and was about to run into the extreme folly.” (*Orlando* 96)

Orlando transcends history by moving from one century to another. Through the use of the geographical and architectural hints, Virginia Woolf relates the passage of time and creates a clear distinction of what has been, what is yet to happen in Orlando’s life and what will remain in the end. Time becomes an invisible fluid, an antagonistic force, though defeated by Orlando, who becomes a hero in the battle with the clock:

As the ninth, tenth and eleventh strokes struck, a huge blackness sprawled over the whole of London. With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All was dark; all was doubt; all was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun. (*Orlando* 133)

In *Orlando*, both time and individual existence are in contrast to the measured segments of chronological time as quantified by an inflexible clock. For Virginia Woolf, the past and the present flow together and are as one. A character may change by contact with the past as well as by contact with the present. Orlando, for example, symbolizes the continuous imposing of the past into the present.

Living throughout centuries, Lady Orlando is able to make a distinction between the present century and the previous one, because “There was something definite and distinct about the age, which reminded her of the eighteenth century, except that there was a distraction, a desperation” (176). Her life is compared with an “immensely long tunnel in which she seemed to have been travelling for hundreds of years widened” (177).

Orlando is both a historically encrypted biography of desire and a novel about a fictional androgynous character able to become immortal as time is dissolved and it no longer exists as an entity of delimitation between life and death. For Orlando, both man and woman, time no longer exists. The past is not sealed and dislocated from the present. The clock is defeated and it no longer represents a threat for the main character, who is not a victim of temporality as other ones are, but it is the hero of time that becomes the owner not only of multiple identities but also of multiple temporalities.

The third and last novel of my discussion written by Virginia Woolf takes the form of an inner culture of soliloquies, *The Waves*.

The Waves reveals a portrait representing the interlaced lives of six friends: Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Susan, and Rhoda. The novel is divided into nine sections, each of which corresponds to a time of day, and, symbolically, to a period in the lives of the characters. Also, the fragmentation of the self is suggested in the unusual form of the novel, which consists of the soliloquies of 6 characters which express their inner experience with little or no reference to the external events that would constitute the plot. In the novel mentioned, the characters are constructed both by their own voice and by all the other one's voices, as they describe one another in the course of the book.

The novel represents the continuity of both time and individual existence in contrast with the segments of chronological time as measured by an inflexible clock. For Virginia Woolf, the past and present flow together and are as one.

As Jane Goldman points out, "The Waves is considered Woolf's most difficult, high modernist text". The novel is "beautifully stylised, poetical work" (69) that alternates descriptive pastoral passages with the sets of soliloquies by six characters, in parallel with the descriptive images of the tides of the sea. From her perspective, *The Waves* appears to be as much a novel about individuality and solitude, as about friendship.

The Waves experiments with a kind of relative time as recorded in six minds simultaneously, that is the main six protagonists. The representative idea of continuity respecting the historical order of the time appealed to Virginia Woolf; history seemed a "likely vehicle" for explaining the relation of the individual and the present moment to the stream of time. (Stern 4)

The passing of time is indicated by the ebb and flow of waves, the sunlight rising higher and higher, steeping the garden in splendor, and the birds swelling into full chorus as evening comes and maturity is at hand: "The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. (...) The birds sang their blank melody outside." (*The Waves* 5)

Each character perceives the world around them differently but they all live at the same time, as the images of the nature are mirroring in their eyes:

'I see a ring,' said Bernard, 'hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.' 'I see a slab of pale yellow,' said Susan, 'spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.' 'I hear a sound,' said Rhoda, 'cheep, chirp; cheep chirp; going up and down.' 'I see a globe,' said Neville, 'hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.' 'I see a crimson tassel,' said Jinny, 'twisted with gold threads.' 'I hear something stamping,' said Louis. 'A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.' (*The Waves* 6)

From the beginning, the six main protagonists are represented in their childhood, as they will develop and reach maturity at the end of the novel. Even if they are young, they are

able to open up their feelings to each other, as Susan suggests: “Though my mother still knits white socks for me and hems pinafores and I am a child, I love and I hate.” (*The Waves* 7) their strong friendship is demonstrated by Bernard statement, as he recalls the need of unity: ‘But when we sit together, close,’ said Bernard, ‘we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory.’

The passing of the time is revealed by the description of the sea at the end of each part of the novel: “The sun rose higher. Blue waves, green waves swept a quick fan over the beach, circling the spike of sea-holly and leaving shallow pools of light here and there on the sand.” (*The Waves* 11) The characters seem to grow as another tide hits the shore, the parallel between their development and the images of the sea being relevant: “‘Now,’ said Bernard, ‘the time has come. The day has come. (...) I am going to school for the first time. (...) This is my first night at school,’ said Susan’ (*The Waves* 24-126).

Bernard seems to be the one who desires to preserve the time, as he is expressing his desire to become a writer that is able to leave something behind:

I note the fact for future reference with many others in my notebook. When I am grown up I shall carry a notebook—a fat book with many pages, methodically lettered. I shall enter my phrases. Under B shall come “Butterfly powder”. If, in my novel, I describe the sun on the window-sill, I shall look under B and find butterfly powder. (*The Waves* 28)

Meanwhile, Susan recollects her past memories and shows an excitement towards the passing of the days:

‘For how many months,’ said Susan, ‘for how many years, have I run up these stairs, in the dismal days of winter, in the chilly days of spring? Now it is midsummer. We go upstairs to change into white frocks to play tennis—Jinny and I with Rhoda following after. I count each step as I mount, counting each step something done with. So each night I tear off the old day from the calendar, and screw it tight into a ball. (...) ‘I have torn off the whole of May and June,’ said Susan, ‘and twenty days of July. I have torn them off and screwed them up so that they no longer exist, save as a weight in my side. (*The Waves* 30-32)

Time passes as an overflow of imperceptible moments, as the characters’ statements suggest: “‘Now, too, the time is coming when we shall leave school and wear long skirts, says Jinny.” The metaphor which Rhoda creates is meant to represent the symbol of her growing compared with one of a tree, the impossibility of being immortal and suspending the time, while Bernard announces their growing and the years of childhood that will disappear forever, as they may have separates ways in life.

According to Malcolm Bradbury, *The Waves* is “a prose, a poem, a flow, a novel beyond the novel, a work where every atom is saturated, a combination of thought, sensation, the voice of the sea, a book written to a rhythm, not a plot” (189). Each character of the novel is the representation of a moment that flows in time, their thoughts and statements being able to suggest and to give hints about their growth, their maturity, their transition from childhood through teenage and adulthood. Their thoughts and recollections of the past acts like an interior monolog, an inner diary in which every aspect of their life, every emotion and perception of the world is put down.

Bernard acts like a prophet able to anticipate what will happen in the future and he presents the philosophical aspect of a human being’s life. He sees more profoundly what life gives him and he reflects upon it:

Time has whizzed back an inch or two on its reel; our short progress has been cancelled. I think also that our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence. (...) it that I may have children, may cast a fling of seed wider, beyond this generation, this doom- encircled population, shuffling each other in endless competition along the street? My daughters shall come here, in other summers; my sons shall turn new fields. (*The Waves* 63)

So it happens to Louis, as he reflects upon the passing on the time with its changes, Percival's death, Susan becoming a mother. He compares their life with the clouds that constantly change in the sky: "Percival has died (he died in Egypt; he died in Greece; all deaths are one death). Susan has children; Neville mounts rapidly to the conspicuous heights. Life passes. The clouds change perpetually over our houses." (*The Waves* 64) Susan also is able to perceive the flow of time and to feel the changes that occur: "'Summer comes, and winter,' said Susan. 'The seasons pass. The pear fills itself and drops from the tree. The dead leaf rests on its edge.'" (79)

In Virginia Woolf's novel, nature is in concordance with the time and the characters life. Time changes, so as nature and the human beings. The description of the nature is able to suggest what will happen in the life of the characters: "Some petals had fallen in the garden. They lay shell-shaped on the earth. The dead leaf no longer stood upon its edge, but had been blown, now running, now pausing, against some stalk. (...) 'And time,' said Bernard, 'lets fall its drop. (...) I have lost my youth'." (*The Waves* 82)

Time follows its usual and monotonic course but the thoughts of the characters have no longer identity, as the unity of feelings, emotions, reflections is created. It seems that everybody thinks the same: "Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening" (*The Waves* 231). The characters are about to end their journey in time, because the ultimate enemy will defeat them, the death: 'And in me too the wave rises. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!' The waves broke on the shore. (*The Waves* 254)

In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf attempts to convey the idea of some continuous stream of consciousness. Six characters flow along the stream, traveling from their childhood to middle age. Different periods and events in their lives form the crests of waves, like moments in contrast to the flux of time. Therefore, each wave represents the pattern of each character's existence, from an initial period of growth and expectation to the culmination of the wave, or fulfillment, and finally, to disillusionment and decline.

The novel becomes the expression of six identities that merge into a "common lyrical rhythm" (189), as Malcolm Bradbury suggest. In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf is concerned with immediate experience. She records moment by moment the flux of consciousness, using intensity as the basis of choice. Also, she marks the transition from one moment to another. Life goes on against the steady beats of the clock because the existence of the subjective time annihilates the measurable one. We are able to find out about the natural course of time through the description of the waves and through the characters' thoughts and inner monologues.

Memory plays a central role in this process of becoming a self. The use of the present tense focuses the attention on the characters and their thoughts as they are expressed at the present moment, as a continuous overflow of inner monologues in relation to the passing of the time. The description of the sun phases and the sea are related in the past tense, in order to

create the image that the characters have been there, on the beach, next to the sea and they bring about the images of what that they saw, from their memories.

The Waves time is conceived of as a succession of individual moments, an overflow of “soliloquies”, as Susan Dick suggests in her article entitled: “Literary Realism in Mrs. Dalloway, *To the Light House*, *Orlando* and *The Waves*” (Sellers 68), in which the conventional time is measured only at the subjective level, by the representation of thoughts and interior monologues. Virginia Woolf had set out to annihilate the lines between mathematical units of time and to convey time as a continuous stream, an unbroken unity; therefore, the characters’ ideas and feelings laid down in the past continue to live in the human mind of the present.

As a conclusion, one might say that multicultural dialogue and historical transition can be achieved in literature, as well. With such fictional characters shaped by Virginia Woolf, whether discussing about *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando* and *The Waves*, time intertwines with culture, stream of consciousness, history and monologue in order to create a specific language characterized by a defying temporality.

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