

ANACHRONY, FOCALIZATION, AND NARRATIVE VOICE IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*:  
EXPLORING TEMPORAL COMPLEXITY

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the construction of narrative temporality and consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* by adopting a synthetic approach to narratology, grounded on Gérard Genette theoretical framework constituting the categories of order, duration and frequency and the theory of focalization as developed and further worked out by Genette and Mieke BAL respectively. The analysis shows that the temporal flow in Woolf's work is deliberately unsettled by the devices of anachrony, to produce a temporal structure in which past and present always blend and synchronize through memory, anticipation and psychological association. The differences in the duration of the narratives show that there is a distinct difference between story time and discourse time: the former shortens the time spent in the story, whereas the latter lengthens the time within the narration. Repetition and iterative frequency add to a subjective consciousness, rather than a chronological, cyclical temporal logic. Conversely, the study integrates Paul Simpson's narratorial framework of "reflector mode" (B(R)), which is a key "focalizing" mode involving character consciousness for event filtering, generating limited, internalized views. This framework is exacerbated by the use of negative modality, which marks uncertainty, limitation and epistemic instability in the voice that tells the story. All of these strategies displace omniscient narration and establish an irregularly shaped representational field where reality is dependent on perceptual mediation. The study posits that the story of *Mrs Dalloway* represents a modernist twist in the concept of narrative form, as it shows the interplay between temporal structure and focalization, creating a disjointed, fragmented, and subjectively crafted reality highlighted by Virginia Wolf, the exceptional postmodern novelist of 20th century.

**Keywords:** *Mrs. Dalloway*; Narratology; Focalization; Narrative Temporality; Anachrony; Stream of Consciousness; Reflector Mode; Modernist Fiction

## INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf is one of the leading practitioners of the literary modernism movement for her radical break with Victorian realism. In a way, linear plots, objective description and the importance of external events were pushed aside in favour of the intricacies of human consciousness and subjective experience. Her novels deal with the processes of memory, identity and perception; how people make meaning out of what happens to them. Woolf tried to capture the images and feelings that arise in the passing moments of everyday life and how these can be represented in an objective way. Thus, her fiction is a new departure from representations of “empirical reality” to the portrayal of interiority and subjectivity (Leech, 2007). The difficulties in characterization and narrative have been a key factor in the modern novel's history and the changes it underwent, with some claiming that Woolf's approach had a decisive influence on the narrative novel. Of particular interest is that Woolf invented rich linguistic devices, which allow multiple consciousness's to be represented in one narrative structure, thus challenging the relationship between narrator, character and reader. (Lee, 1996, Witworth, 2005). One of Woolf's most distinctive innovations in the narrative is the **stream of**

**consciousness** method. With this approach, she tried to depict the stream of thoughts, memories, perceptions and associations that constitute mental life. But Woolf's stream is not just a transcription of thought in a natural way; it is also a finely crafted stream of consciousness with the help of techniques like free indirect discourse, point of view changes, associative links, and the merging of past and present. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the flow of consciousness shifts from one character to another, and the reader is granted deep insight into the characters' minds and their inner worlds, but also into the disjointedness of human experience. In this work, Guo (2017) explains that the free indirect thought effect in Woolf's work gives the appearance of spontaneous thought while keeping the text coherent in a way that reflects the unique cognitive functioning of the different characters. In a similar fashion, Cui (2014) argues that Woolf's narrative style allows the "multipersonal representation of consciousness," so that the novel shifts effortlessly between multiple subjectivities without an explicit narratorial voice. In these stylistic breakthroughs, Woolf was not only changing the form of the novel but also expressing a modernist conception of reality as many, mutable, and most importantly, as perceived.

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of the most important modernist novels, particularly for time, consciousness and narrative structure. The novel does not construct time in a linear and chronological way, instead it presents time as broken up and subjective as remembered, perceived and internal. It is an important text for a study in the ways in which modernist writing is challenging traditional approaches to the craft of storytelling. The present research examines how time and consciousness are depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway* by using Gerard Genette's narratological notions of order, duration and frequency. The study utilizes the theory of focalization by Paul Simpson to examine how the perspective is structured in terms of a reflector mode (B(R)), reflecting the consciousness of characters instead of an external narrator. The paper aims to demonstrate the merging of these theories to present a broken and fractured reality in which time is subjectively experienced rather than objective. The analysis focuses on the fact that Mrs. Dalloway creates a new form of narrative time, that is, a new way of integrating external events and the shifting flow of human consciousness. The present research therefore aims at following Questions:

1. How do Gérard Genette's concepts of order, duration, and frequency operate in *Mrs Dalloway* to construct its narrative representation of time?
  2. How are fragmented consciousness and subjective reality constructed in *Mrs Dalloway* through reflector mode and negative modality within Paul Simpson's narratorial framework?
- Narrative theory has been significantly shaped by structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, especially the model of narrative discourse proposed by Gérard Genette. Globalization, migration and economic development further compound this linguistic legacy in the urban setting. Cities also unite speakers of various languages, which form multifaceted communication networks. (Maryam et al.,2026). In *Narrative Discourse* (1980), Genette presents a systematic analysis of the temporality of the narrative by defining the three categories of order, duration and frequency and claims that narrative time is a fictionalized discourse, not a chronological one. In literary research, this theoretical support has been employed in numerous ways to study the ways in which texts use time to create meaning, instead of merely representing lived time. Literary impressionism in the modernist novel is essentially based on the democratization of the subjective sensory experience as opposed to

objective reality. Virginia Woolf took the visual transformations of Post-Impressionist painting, promoted by the Bloomsbury Group, and transformed them into fluid prose (Bayraktar, 2022; Snaith, 2000). Impressionistic narrative design does not offer a fixed, consensual material reality, but rather external reality as a dynamic reality, entirely within the consciousness of the observer. This is a method that focuses on the direct, immediate experience of reality, before the mind's "filtering, sorting, and thinking" processes. To achieve this level of subjective realism, impressionistic prose uses what Woolf termed the "reception of a 'myriad impressions,' an unceasing stream of sensory stimuli" (1919/1925, p. 106). Traditional Victorian realism was based on clear and accurate descriptions of physical environments and fixed social structures that would substantiate the narrative world. Modernist impressionism undermines this infrastructure, seeing physical objects as fluid and permeable to the surrounding atmosphere and light (Chatman, 1978, Katz, 2023, Hussey, 1995). The text no longer describes an object as it is, but follows the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" as they fall upon human perception, making the narrative turn inwards. This is accomplished by the use of very lyrical, atomized language,

analogous to the taches, or individual spots of color, which the painterly impressionists used (Stewart, 1985). In works such as *Jacob's Room*, the boundaries between different physical spaces and between human bodies are broken down and frequently materialize in the light and colour, for example, "lights swimming over her in coloured islands" (Woolf, 1922, p. 61). The text is a reduction of physical form to fluid visual data, simulating the biological process of sight. This formal change represents a radical change of philosophy from the nineteenth-century positivism, which posited that truth lay in the external artefact, to the highly personal and fleeting sense of the observer (Herman, 2002). Moreover, literary impressionism serves as a useful means of structuring the narrative, especially in the case of multi-focalized texts. The overall impression of a shared external event is often an important spatial anchor (Mullan, 2006, Cohan, 1978) as an unstructured stream of consciousness can easily become total narrative chaos. The narrative fabric is interrupted by a passing airplane or a tolling bell, which produces a simultaneous, instant feeling that brings otherwise separate minds together in space. The external event is short and vague, but its significance is all in the many disjointed psychological impressions it evokes in each of the characters at once. This is

a division of one moment, which highlights the radical multiplicity of modern human experience. In the famous passage about the airplane, in Mrs. Dalloway, for example, a unique visual event is broken down into a range of distinct, localized interpretations, depending on the observer's psychological condition the smoke trail is a relatively insignificant advertisement to a stable observer, but it is a powerful cosmic message to the shell-shocked Septimus (Woolf, 1925). In this intentional division of the senses, the impressionistic approach has successfully created the impression that there is a unified, single reality, and this unified reality is an illusion, thus establishing the extent to which the true field of the modern novel is the rich, unorganized field of internal perception. Using Gérard Genette's (1980) structuralist approach, the reader can see that the modernist narrative structure is made up of two questions: "who sees" (focalization) and "who speaks" (narration), which can be analyzed independently. Modernist fiction is actively working against this contrast by eschewing omniscient narration for multiple internal focalization, or the dynamic shift of the narrative filter from one character to another. This formal selection creates a network of human consciousness, a mosaic of reality, a subjective reality, instead of a single, objective

reality (Toolan, 2001, Kenan, 2002). The fluid perspective directly influences Genette's (1980) dimensions of narrative time, which charts the structural relationship between chronological story time (*histoire*) and textual narrative time (*récit*). The modernist prose breaks apart linear teleology with anachronies, and associative analepses (flashbacks) reveal the way that past memory intrudes into present consciousness. In addition, the pace of the story is based on extreme length changes. Large stretches of chronological time are blanked out in sweeping ellipses, while micro-moments of sensory experience are extended into huge pauses that involve a complete stoppage of objective time and the text grows to include internal psychological depth (Genette, 1988, Fluderink, 1993).

Mrs Dalloway has also been the subject of an important critical study, Julia Briggs' *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005), which gives a useful critical perspective on Woolf's narrative technique in relation to the novel. For Briggs, Woolf's novels are defined by psychology's interiority: external events are secondary to consciousness, memory. She emphasizes that Mrs Dalloway creates time as porous and open – constantly in the present moment, yet also in the past. This is consonant with the idea that Woolf's storytelling technique is not linear, but

associative and emotional. This reading is supported by further work in the field by Mieke BAL on the concept of 'focalization'. BAL further developed the theory of Genette in his *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997), which focuses on how perception is involved in the construction of a narrative. She believes that the focalization is not just a way of telling an event in the story, but also a way in which events are perceived and experienced within the story. That is especially true of *Mrs Dalloway* where internal focalization predominates, and where the authority of the story is diffused. This has been a highly successful application of BAL's framework in Woolf studies to account for the changing consciousness at different points between the characters of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. More targeted empirical research is done by Adel Thamery (2016) in his article titled "A Study of Focalization in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*" Thamery provides examples of the ways in which Woolf uses an internal focalization that is different from one scene to another in the story without using markers. He claims that it is a method which generates a disjointed but coherent world of stories and in which objective reality is substituted by perspectival experience. This work directly contributes to proving Mrs

Dalloway's ability to create reality by changing perception, as opposed to a reliance on fixed narration. In the same way, in the article "Variable Focalization and Stream of Consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*" by Ana Tsereteli (2021), the author analyzes how the narrative technique in Woolf's novel is similar to Genette's internal focalization. The novel's pace of shifting consciousnesses among the characters is, according to Tsereteli, a result of the novel's "fragmented" narrative style that resembles psychological experience. She also points out that Woolf's use of free indirect discourse enables several simultaneous lines of mental thought to take place in one telling, further perpetuating the instability of the telling voice. A variety of studies, including linguistic and stylistic studies, have helped to shed light on understanding. Woolf's narrative technique is further supported by linguistic and stylistic research rather than focalization studies alone. "Parentheticals and the Presentation of Multipersonal Consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*" in a *Language and Literature* article by Cui Xiaojing (2014) discusses the syntactic structures as they show the varying consciousness. According to Cui, Woolf's parenthetical insertion and interrupted syntax is emblematic of the cognitive fragmentation and is a way of permitting several layers of

thought to exist in the same sentence. This confirms the reading that Woolf's mode of storytelling contains psychological instability in the mode of language. Another stylistic perspective on analysing the subjectivity of a text is offered by Paul Simpson's model of narratorial stance, specifically reflector mode (B(R)) and negative modality. While it has been mainly elaborated in *Stylistics* (1993/2004) and has been used in the discourse analysis studies to account for the encoding of uncertainty and perspective limitation in language. Third-person narration through character consciousness is called reflector mode, and epistemic uncertainty is indicated by linguistic hedging is called negative modality. These ideas are especially relevant to an analysis of how the author of the novel, Virginia Woolf, takes away the direct authority of the narrator and gives way to mediate perception.

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946) provides a broader theoretical foundation for understanding modernist representation. Auerbach argues that modernist literature dissolves objective reality into subjective perception, particularly through interior monologue and psychological realism. His discussion of Woolf highlights how external reality is no longer presented as stable but is instead reconstructed through fragmented

consciousness. This supports the broader claim that *Mrs Dalloway* represents reality as perspectival and internally mediated. Although existing studies address focalization (Bal, 1997, Thamery, 2009, Jahn, 1996), stream of consciousness (Briggs, 2005, Tsereteli, 2021, and linguistic subjectivity (Cui, 1978), most analyses treat narrative temporality and linguistic modality separately. There is limited research that integrates Genette's temporal framework with Simpson's reflector mode and negative modality to explain how structural time manipulation and epistemic uncertainty jointly construct fragmented consciousness in *Mrs Dalloway*. This study addresses that gap by combining narratological and stylistic approaches into a unified analytical model. This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research methodology to analyze the construction of narrative temporality and consciousness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. The research is situated within the fields of narratology and stylistics, focusing on how narrative techniques shape the representation of time and subjective experience in modernist fiction. Rather than using quantitative or corpus-based methods, the study relies on close reading and detailed textual analysis. The research follows a descriptive qualitative design, where *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is treated as a

primary literary text for systematic narratological analysis. The study does not aim to measure linguistic features statistically; instead, it interprets narrative structures in relation to established theoretical frameworks. The analysis is guided primarily by Gérard Genette's narratological model (order, duration, frequency), along with focalization theory developed by Genette and expanded by Mieke BAL, and Simpson's model of modality and reflector-based narration. The entire text is considered, with particular attention to selected passages that demonstrate:

- Temporal shifts such as flashbacks and anticipations (anachrony)
- Variations in narrative pacing (expansion, compression, ellipsis)

### *Genette's Model of Temporal Manipulation*

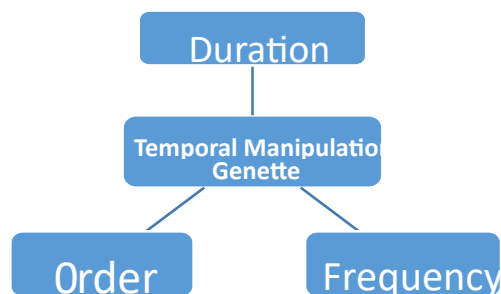
Time, in narratological terms, is understood not as direct representation of real temporal progression but as a structured and linear verbal construction (Bergson, 2002). It functions both as a structuring principle, organizing relations between different states of events, and as a structuralist concept, dependent on the recognition of similarities and differences between temporal moments. In this sense, distinctions between "story time" and "text time" are interpretative constructs rather than direct reflections of real-world time. Gérard Genette identifies three key dimensions of narrative temporality

**Analepsis (Flashback):** A backward movement in time that narrates past events. *Homodiegetic*: relates to the same character or storyline. *Heterodiegetic*: relates to different characters or subplots.

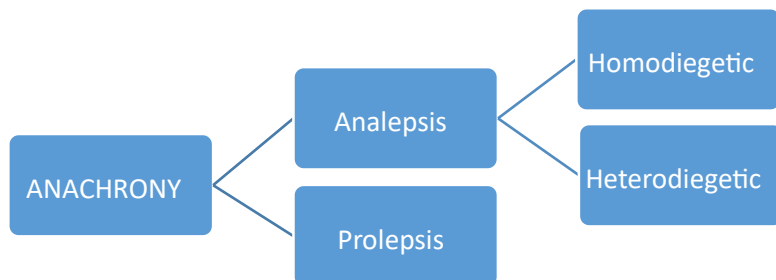
Shifts in focalization and consciousness  
Use of free indirect discourse and modal expressions of uncertainty  
These passages are selected as representative examples of broader narrative patterns across the novel.

### GÉRARD GENETTE'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in narratological and stylistic theories of time and perspective, primarily drawing on Gerard Genette's model of temporal manipulation and further extending into theories of focalization and modal narration. It also incorporates Simpson's model of reflector-based narration and negative modality to explain the construction of subjective consciousness in narrative discourse.



**Prolepsis (Flashforward):** A forward movement in time where future events are narrated before their chronological occurrence.



**Duration** concerns the relationship between story time and narrative discourse time. It examines how much textual space is devoted to events in relation to the time those events are assumed to take. Key variations include:

**Ellipsis:** Omission of story time in the text.

**Descriptive Pause:** Text without progression of story time. **Summary and Scene:**

Compression or expansion of narrative time.

Genette's model emphasizes intra-textual comparison of pace rather than reader-based timing, focusing on how narrative speed varies within the text itself.

**Frequency** refers to the relationship between the number of times an event occurs in the story and how often it is narrated in the text: **Singulative frequency:** One event narrated once. **Repetitive frequency:** One event narrated multiple times. **Iterative frequency:** Multiple events narrated once. 1.

These variations regulate narrative emphasis, repetition, and compression, shaping thematic and psychological effects.

#### *Gérard Genette's Concept of Focalization*

The concept of focalization is developed by Gérard Genette as part of his broader theory of narratology. Focalization is considered one of the most influential concepts in modern narrative theory because it explains the relationship between perception and narration in a literary text. Before Genette, critics often used the term "point of view" in a broad and imprecise manner. Genette refined this idea by distinguishing between: who speaks? (The narrator), and who sees? (The perceiver or focalizer).

This distinction became central to narratology because narration and perception are not always controlled by the same entity. A narrator may tell the story, but events may still be perceived through the consciousness of a particular character (Gerald, 2001, James, 2001).

Genette identifies two primary types of focalization: Internal Focalization and External Focalization.

**Internal focalization** occurs when narrative information is limited to the perception of a particular character. Readers only know what the focalizing character: sees, thinks, feels, or experiences. The narrator does not exceed the

character's knowledge. Genette formulates this Narrator as Characters because narrative knowledge is restricted to the character's consciousness. Internal focalization creates psychological intimacy and subjectivity. Genette further divides internal focalization into **three forms**:

- A. Fixed Internal Focalization:** The narrative remains focused through one character only. Readers experience events entirely through a single consciousness. its characteristics are; stable perspective, psychological depth, limited knowledge and strong subjectivity.
- B. Variable Internal Focalization:** The narrative shifts between multiple focalizing characters. Different sections of the narrative may present events through different consciousnesses. Its characteristics are; multiple perspectives, fragmented perception,

relativized truth, shifting psychological access. This form is common in modernist fiction.

**C. Multiple Internal Focalization:** The same event is presented repeatedly through different characters' perspectives. Readers compare varying interpretations of the same situation. Its characteristics are perspectival plurality, contradictory interpretations, destabilization of objective truth.

## 2. External Focalization

External focalization occurs when the narrator knows less than the characters. The narrator only describes externally observable behavior without access to internal thoughts or emotions as the narrator's knowledge is restricted. Readers observe actions from the outside but cannot directly access consciousness.

Genette's Temporal Manipulation		
1. Order <i>Chronological sequence</i>	2. Duration <i>Textual pace</i>	3. Frequency <i>Repetition patterns</i>
Anachrony <i>Disruption of sequence</i>	Ellipsis <i>Story time &gt; text</i>	Singulative <i>1 event / 1 telling</i>
Analepsis <i>Flashback</i>	Descriptive pause <i>Text time &gt; story</i>	Repetitive <i>1 event / n tellings</i>
Prolepsis <i>Flashforward</i>	Scene & summary <i>Speed variation</i>	Iterative <i>n events / 1 telling</i>
Analepsis sub-types		Intra-textual comparison <i>Pacing relative to itself</i>
Homodiegetic <i>Same story</i>	Heterodiegetic <i>New story</i>	

*Based on Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (1980)*

Simpson's Model of Reflector Mode and Narrative Perspective

Building on Simpson's typology of narrative modes, this study incorporates reflector-based narration

(B(R)) and negative modality to analyze narrative consciousness.

**Reflector mode** refers to third-person narration filtered through a character's consciousness. The narrative is internalized, meaning that perception,

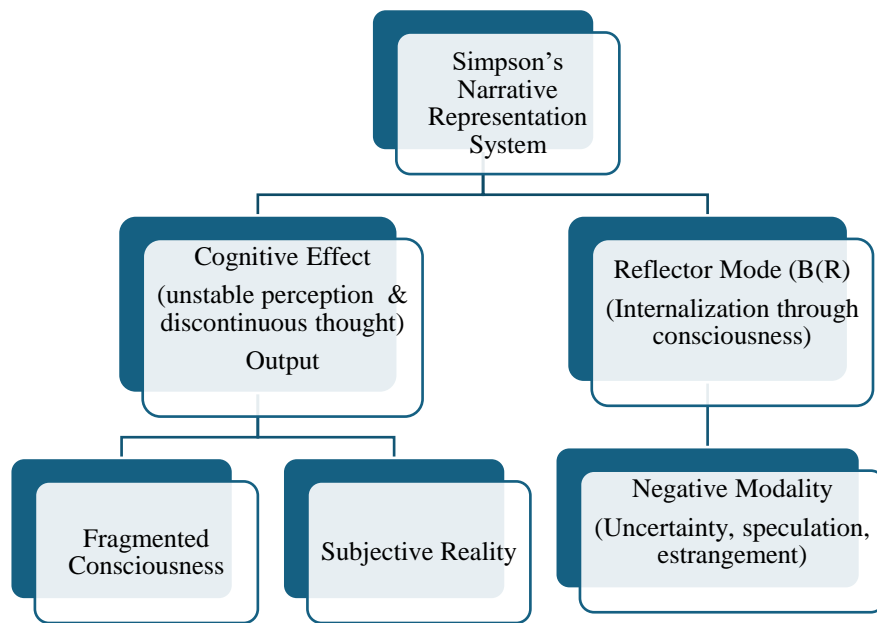
thought, and emotion are presented as they are experienced by the character rather than an external narrator. Its key features include: Third-person pronouns (he/she), Absence of overt narratorial authority, Use of perception and cognition verbs (saw, felt, and thought, remembered)

**Negative modality** expresses uncertainty, limitation, and epistemic instability. It prevents narration from presenting events as fixed truths. The markers include: Modal verbs (might, could, must have), Modal adverbs (perhaps, possibly), Perceptual hedging (it seemed, it appeared, as if)

The combination of reflector mode and negative modality produces a layered model of subjective narration; **Perceptual mediation**: All narrative content is filtered through consciousness, **Epistemic**

**destabilization**: That consciousness is linguistically uncertain, **Non-objective reality**: Events are presented as perceived rather than factual.

This interaction generates: Fragmented consciousness: Discontinuous and unstable thought processes, Subjective reality: A constructed reality shaped entirely by perception. This theoretical model operates through **three main principles**: **Mediation Principle**: All narrative information is filtered through character consciousness, **Uncertainty Principle**: All perception is linguistically and epistemically weakened, **Non-objectivity Principle**: Reality is represented as perceived, interpreted, and unstable rather than fixed or authoritative.



Simpson's Narratological framework

**Genette's Model of Temporal Manipulation and *Mrs Dalloway***

Genette defines **order** as the relationship between the chronological sequence of events in the story (the *fabula*) and their pseudo-

chronological arrangement in the text (the *sjuzhet*). Deviations from chronology are anachronies (Genette, 1980).

In *Mrs Dalloway* (p.35), the "first narrative" (the primary story-time) spans a single day in mid-June 1923, from 10:00 AM to past midnight. However, the novel continuously disrupts this linear progression through analepses (flashbacks) triggered by psychological association.

An **external Homodiegetic analepsis** refers to an event that took place *before* the start of the first narrative but belongs to the same storyline (Genette, 1980).

**Textual Trigger:** The novel opens with Clarissa stepping out to buy flowers. The squeak of a hinge instantly transports her back thirty years to Bourton when she was eighteen.

*What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air.*" (p. 3)

This establishes an immediate overlay of the past onto the present. The physical sensation of the fresh London morning air serves as a gateway to an extensive external analepsis that reveals her complicated romantic history with Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway, framing her entire current psychological state.

An **internal analepsis** recounts events that occurred *after* the beginning of the primary narrative but are recalled later. However, when characters recall events prior to the narrative but specific to a parallel subplot, they can function as heterodiegetic entries that fill in character history. Septimus's hallucinations on the park bench open up a traumatic analepsis to the Italian front during World War I and the death of his officer, Evans. "*There was Evans in the trench! A man in grey was walking towards them... 'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For the war was over; King George English girls; and Evans was dead.*" (p. 70). This disrupts the physical space of Regent's Park with the psychological space of 1918 Italy, demonstrating how trauma shatters chronological time.

**Duration** examines the relationship between the time an event takes in the story (*story time*, measured in minutes, hours, or years) and the spatial length dedicated to it in the text (*discourse/text time*, measured in lines or pages) (Genette, 1980). Woolf dramatically alters **temporal velocity** by favoring interiority over external action.

A **descriptive pause/Interior Extension** conventionally occurs when the story stops while description happens ( $\$ST = 0, DT > 0\$$ ). Woolf reconfigures this: the *external* action

pauses while the character's *internal* thoughts expand across pages. When Clarissa looks at her reflection in the mirror while mending her green dress:

*"That she held the needle with an exquisite skill now she felt the need of it, as she had felt it then, to gather it together, to represent her... that was her self-pointed; dartlike; definite."* (p. 37) . The physical action of pushing a needle through silk takes seconds in story-time, yet Woolf stretches it over several pages of text time to explore Clarissa's anxiety over ageing and societal identity.

**Scenes** traditionally balance story and discourse time, usually through dialogue. In *Mrs Dalloway*, scenes are frequently destabilized because the dialogue is interrupted by massive internal digressions. Peter Walsh's unexpected visit to Clarissa's house (pp. 40-48), External Story Time: Approximately 10-15 minutes, Discourse Space: 8 pages.

While they exchange brief, awkward spoken sentences ("How heavenly it is to see you!", p. 40), the text dives into pages of internal monologues about their mutual regrets, making a 10-minute encounter feel like an epic confrontation.

**Narrative Ellipsis** occurs when an amount of story-time is completely omitted from the text . The transition between the afternoon activities and the start of Clarissa's party. The clock

strikes, and the narrative effortlessly leaps over hours of preparations to find Clarissa standing at the top of her stairs welcoming guests (p. 165).

Woolf eliminates routine chronological filler to prioritize moments of high psychological intensity, structurally mirroring how the human brain naturally forgets mundane gaps in time.

**Frequency** measures the repetitions between the story and the narrative text: how many times an event happens versus how many times it is recounted is referred to as Narrative repetition by Genette (1980). Two types of Frequencies have been underlined by Genette:

**A. *Repetitive Frequency***; *narrating an event multiple times that only happened once in the story. The moment Sally Seton kissed Clarissa on the lips at Bourton. This single event is recalled and re-analyzed by Clarissa at multiple points in the novel (e.g., p. 35, p. 185).*

*"The most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips."* (p. 35)

*This repetitive frequency illustrates psychological fixation. The kiss acts as an emotional anchor, a pure moment of past happiness that Clarissa constantly returns to when she feels stifled by her present life as Mrs. Richard Dalloway.*

*B. Iterative Frequency; Narrating once what happens many times in the story. The chiming of Big Ben throughout the day.*

"The leaden circles dissolved in the air." (Repeated phrase, e.g., p. 4, p. 48, p. 186)

The repetitive tolling of the clock is rendered using an iterative linguistic motif. While it marks the relentless, objective passage of chronological time (*monument time*), it serves to ground the highly fragmented and subjective consciousness of the characters back into a shared, physical reality.

#### Focalization and Consciousness: Gérard Genette's *Mrs Dalloway*

Genette's vital intervention in narrative theory was separating voice ("Who speaks?") from focalization ("Who sees?") (Genette, 1980). In *Mrs Dalloway*, while the narrative voice remains technically heterodiegetic (a third-person narrator outside the action), the focalization is overwhelmingly internal. Woolf utilizes Genette's categories to bypass traditional omniscience, crafting a world where reality is entirely dependent on the psychological mediation of her characters.

*The Voice vs. Focalization Split (Who Speaks vs. Who Sees)*

In traditional Victorian literature, the entity speaking and the entity seeing were often identical: an omniscient narrator who both observed and judged. Woolf shatters this

alignment. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the third-person narrator provides the linguistic medium (the voice), but a character's mind provides the perspective (the focalizer). Consider the famous opening sequence as Clarissa walks through London:

"For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? Over twenty, —one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or a solemnity..." (p. 4)

The Voice: The words are delivered by an external, third-person narrator ("Clarissa was positive")

The Focalizer: The sensory data, the memory of living in Westminster, and the emotional evaluation of the "hush" belong exclusively to Clarissa.

This creates a dual-layered discourse. The narrator acts as a linguistic conduit or "reflector" for Clarissa's internal consciousness, allowing the reader to inhabit her mind without switching to a first-person "I" narrative.

#### Genette's Taxonomy of Focalization in the Novel

##### A. Variable Internal Focalization (The Shifting Consciousness):

Genette notes that variable internal focalization occurs when the narrative perspective shifts fluidly from one character's consciousness to

another. This is the dominant structural engine of *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel does not stay bound to Clarissa; it seamlessly transitions through a mosaic of minds. When a mysterious car backfires in Bond Street, the narrative uses this singular external event to cross-focalize between completely unrelated characters.

*"Everything had come to a standstill. The tin of white cap powder on the top of the motorcar; the motor-car itself... passers-by stopped and looked... Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him."* (pp. 13-15)

Within the span of a few pages, the focalization moves from a generic crowd perspective, to Clarissa Dalloway, to Septimus Warren Smith. Woolf uses variable focalization to create a fragmented, relativized truth. London is not an objective city; it is an accumulation of subjective impressions running parallel to one another.

**B. Multiple Internal Focalization (The Plurality of a Single Event)** occurs when the same event or person is filtered repeatedly through different characters' perspectives, allowing the reader to compare varying interpretations.

Clarissa's Focalization of Peter: When Peter Walsh visits unexpectedly, Clarissa looks at him and filters him through her own anxieties: *"He is in love... He is totally unfulfilled... He has done nothing."* Peter's Focalization of Clarissa: Moments later, the perspective shifts entirely to

Peter's mind as he looks back at her: *"She is cold... She is a perfect hostess... She has grown older."*

Objective reality is completely destabilized. The reader is never given an absolute, "true" account of who Clarissa or Peter really are; instead, we are suspended between their mutually biased, highly defensive internal focalizations of each other.

**C. Moments of External Focalization (The Outside Observer)**

Though rare in this novel, Genette's external focalization (where the narrator knows less than the characters and only describes externally observable behavior, \$Narrator < Character\$) is used strategically by Woolf as an emotional foil to the intense interiority. The public perception of Septimus and Rezia in Regent's Park, as witnessed by an anonymous onlooker, Maisie Johnson:

*"A young man and a young woman, apparently quite well-to-do, sitting on a bench... The young man looked wild; the young woman was speaking urgently... it was odd, she thought, how people looked."* (p. 26)

Because Maisie cannot access Septimus's mind, she sees only a strange, slightly uncomfortable public domestic scene. By pulling back to an external focalization, Woolf reminds the reader of the tragic isolation of the characters: the vast, terrifying gulf between a person's catastrophic inner world (Septimus's shell-shock) and how

they are cursorily perceived by society from the outside.

### **Simpson Model of Narratorial Modality and Construction of Subjective Reality**

*A. Mode: Reflector Mode (B(R)); Within the Simpson's narratorial framework, reflector mode (B(R)) refers to third-person narration that is internally focalized through a character's consciousness. The narrative does not present events from an external, authoritative perspective but aligns itself with what a character perceives, thinks, and experiences. In Mrs Dalloway, this mode is central to the representation of psychological interiority, as the narrative frequently shifts into the mental space of characters such as Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith.*

*"What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air." (p. 3)*

This passage exemplifies reflector mode through its alignment with Clarissa's consciousness.

Although the narration is in the third person ("it had always seemed to her"), the language reflects her immediate sensory and emotional experience. The exclamatory expressions ("What a lark! What a plunge!") Are not presented as external description but as

internalized thought, merging narration with character perception. The temporal shift ("had always seemed to her") further situates the narrative within her memory, reinforcing the internal focalization.

*"Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known..." (p. 24-25)*

This passage is clearly focalized through Septimus Warren Smith and exemplifies reflector mode (B(R)). Although the narration is grammatically in the third person, the sentences directly represent Septimus's internal thought processes without quotation marks or narratorial framing. The abrupt declarative statements "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God."— are not presented as objective truths but as Septimus's private revelations.

The parenthetical insertion briefly signals the narratorial presence, but it does not distance the reader from Septimus's consciousness. Instead, it reinforces that these statements originate from his mental activity. The sequence of fragmented, imperative-like expressions ("Change the world. No one kills from hatred.") Reflects a disjointed cognitive process, where thoughts emerge abruptly and without logical progression.

The use of reflector mode (B(R)) internalizes narrative perspective by shifting focus from external events to the character's mental processes. It removes overt narratorial authority, allowing consciousness to organize the narrative and enabling fluid movement between perception, memory, and thought. As a result, reality is not presented as objective or stable but is mediated through individual consciousness, establishing uncertainty, subjectivity, and interpretive instability in the text.

**B. Modality: Negative Modality:** *Within the narratorial framework, negative modality refers to the linguistic encoding of uncertainty, speculation, and limited knowledge. It is typically realized through modal verbs, perceptual qualifiers, and estrangement markers such as seemed, as if, and perhaps. When combined with reflector mode (B(R)), negative modality signals that the character through whom the narrative is filtered does not possess stable or authoritative knowledge, thereby introducing epistemic instability into the discourse. In Mrs Dalloway, such modal structures are central to the representation of consciousness as uncertain and fragmented.*

*"For so it had always seemed to her..."* (p. 3)

The use of "seemed" functions as a key marker of negative modality. It indicates that Clarissa's experience is not presented as an objective fact

but as a subjective impression. The proposition is epistemically weakened; what is being described is how something appears to her, not how it definitively is. This introduces a layer of interpretive uncertainty into the narrative.

*"It was as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames..."* (p. 15)

The construction "as if" operates as an estrangement marker, signaling that the perception is hypothetical rather than factual. The narrator does not assert that horror is present; instead, the experience is framed as a comparison or impression. This weakens the certainty of the statement and foregrounds the instability of perception.

*"She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself."* (p. 186)

The phrase "felt somehow very like him" clearly exemplifies negative modality, particularly through the use of the modal qualifier "somehow." This term weakens the certainty of the statement, indicating that Clarissa's perception is not fully defined or logically articulated. Rather than asserting a clear identity or connection, the sentence expresses a vague, intuitive impression. The construction does not present an objective fact; instead, it reflects a subjective and partially indeterminate perception. The absence of precise explanation reinforces the epistemic uncertainty embedded

in the statement. Clarissa does not fully understand or rationalize her connection to Septimus; she only senses it. Negative modality in these passages undermines propositional certainty, ensuring that statements are not presented as fixed truths. It marks perception as subjective and interpretive rather than authoritative and introduces hesitation, doubt, and cognitive instability. When combined with reflector mode, it intensifies unstable consciousness, as the reader is given only mediated and incomplete perceptions. This results in fragmented consciousness where thought and perception cannot form a coherent whole.

### ***C. Effect: Uncertainty and Fragmented Consciousness***

According to Paul Simpson, negative modality encodes a narratorial stance characterized by epistemic uncertainty, where statements are presented as tentative, speculative, or perceptually limited rather than as fixed truths. When such modality operates within reflector mode (B(R)), the result is not merely subjective narration but a form of discourse in which consciousness itself becomes unstable and discontinuous. The interaction between internal focalization and epistemic weakening produces a representation of thought that is

fragmented, shifting, and resistant to coherence.

*“She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged.”* (p. 192–193)

This juxtaposition creates epistemic tension rather than certainty. The sentence “She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged” shows fragmented consciousness because it places two opposing states of identity side by side without resolution. Clarissa experiences youth and extreme age simultaneously, which creates a split in self-perception rather than a unified sense of identity. The lack of explanation or logical link between the two feelings produces epistemic uncertainty, as the statement records perception rather than stable knowledge. In Simpson’s terms, reflector mode presents this contradiction as lived experience, making consciousness appear divided, unstable, and internally inconsistent.

The combined use of reflector mode and negative modality disrupt cognitive coherence, presenting thought as broken and non-linear, preventing epistemic closure and leaving perceptions unresolved and open-ended. They represent consciousness as unstable and internally divided rather than unified.

### ***D. Interpretation: Subjective Reality Construction***

Within Paul Simpson's model, the interaction between reflector mode (B(R)) and negative modality does not merely produce uncertainty at the level of language; it fundamentally reshapes the ontological status of reality within the narrative. Since all events are filtered through character consciousness (B(R)) and simultaneously weakened through epistemic modalization, reality is no longer presented as objective or authoritative. Instead, it emerges as a discursively constructed phenomenon, contingent upon perception, interpretation, and cognitive limitation. Thus, Simpson's framework allows us to understand narrative reality as subjective, unstable, and perspectival rather than fixed.

*"The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames."* (p. 18-19)

This sentence demonstrates extreme subjective reality construction. The verbs "wavered," "quivered," and "threatened" encode instability not in the external world but in Septimus's perception of it. The absence of modal correction means the narrative does not distance itself from this hallucinated perception. Instead, reality is fully absorbed into consciousness. In Simpson's framework, reflector mode here eliminates an external authoritative viewpoint, allowing perceptual distortion to function as narrative reality itself.

Reality within the narrative is not a fixed external framework but a product of subjective interpretation, shaped by the limitations and uncertainties of perception. Through this mechanism, the text constructs a modernist representation of reality as inherently fragmented and perspectival.

### **Findings**

A structural and stylistic examination of *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, through the narratological approach of Gérard Genette (1980) and the modal approach of Paul Simpson (1993), demonstrates that Woolf systematically undermines objective, linear reality, in favor of the subjective human consciousness. The associative anachronies (flashbacks) are extended external ones that Woolf uses to launch into the present space, and the physical and sensory triggers are used to bring past memories to life. Trauma also works as a disruptive force in the form of internal analepses, a war hallucination that breaks the physical coordinates of post-war London out of its linear and chronological sequence, demonstrating the psychological trauma's resistance to linear, chronological boundaries. Moreover, narrative velocity is 100% psychological and not physical. The traditional descriptive pause is re-engineered into an interior extension, lengthening a micro-action

that occurs in a few seconds in story time like mending a dress – into pages of textual duration and examining existential anxieties. The usual narrative scenes are also thrown into disarray as spoken dialogue is constantly interrupted by extensive internal digressions and sweeping ellipses remove commonplace chronological padding. This temporal elasticity is designed to simulate actual human cognitive processing, giving special consideration to moments of high psychological intensity rather than to mundane gaps. Woolf makes the distinction between the voice of the story ("who speaks") and the point of view of the character ("who sees") by having an outside, third-person heterodiegetic narrator and shifting the internal focalization. This formal option eliminates the traditional omniscient authority and makes the narrator a linguistic channel or "reflector" (B(R) mode) for individual character psyches. The result is a text that presents itself as a fragmentary mosaic of several internal focalizations, where the narrative refuses the reader a truly objective description of characters or events, instead placing him/her between the mutually biased perceptions of the observers.

Lastly, the study shows how the omnipresent use of negative modality (in the form of linguistic qualifiers and hedges such as seemed, as if, somehow, etc.) essentially changes the

ontological nature of the narrative world. This linguistic de-assertion compromises all propositional certainty, and represents an epistemic instability that renders characters in the text without absolute knowledge. These modal structures absorb the outside reality completely into the character's psyche when they are operating in the reflector mode. The hallucinatory distortions are presented without any narrative correction or distancing, so that the idea of reality in the modernist novel is not a fixed, external, but a fluid phenomenon created by the shifting boundaries of human consciousness.

#### CONCLUSION

This study examined the narrative construction of time, consciousness, and reality in *Mrs Dalloway* through a combined narratological and stylistic framework. Drawing on the temporal model of Gérard Genette and the narratorial typology of Paul Simpson, the research demonstrated how narrative structure and linguistic features work together to produce a distinctly modernist representation of experience. The analysis based on Genette's concepts of order, duration, and frequency revealed that the novel disrupts linear chronology through constant movement between past and present. As a result, time is not presented as a fixed sequence but as a fluid

and subjective experience shaped by memory and perception. Building on this, the application of Simpson's model showed how narrative perspective and modality contribute to the representation of consciousness. The predominance of reflector mode (B(R)) ensures that events are filtered through character consciousness, while the use of negative modality introduces epistemic uncertainty. Together, these features destabilize perception and prevent the formation of fixed meaning. This interaction results in the construction of fragmented consciousness, where thought appears discontinuous and unstable. At the

same time, reality is presented as subjective, since all events are mediated through individual perception rather than an authoritative narrative voice. Thus the study demonstrates that through the interplay of temporal structure, focalization, and modality, the novel constructs a world in which both consciousness and reality are fluid, fragmented, and perspectival. The integration of narratological and stylistic approaches thus provides a comprehensive understanding of how modernist fiction represents the complexity of inner life.

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