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Refraction, Heteroglossia and Chronotope in
Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway

Following Bakhtin’s View of the Novel as Centrifugal Force

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Introduction

According to Michael Lackey, although there are many “outstanding” analyses of Virginia Woolf’s work based on philosophical theories, such approaches place “the critic at odds with Woolf’s political and aesthetic agenda” (76). Woolf’s works were produced in an era when philosophy was re-grounded or even undermined by intellectuals (76), mainly due to the emergence of psychology as an independent discipline (78), and a general “shift in the intellectual community’s view of knowledge”, the focus being drawn onto the soul instead of the mind (81). Lackey argues that Woolf’s works, in particular, present “an uncharitable depiction of philosophy” by highlighting “strategically” its “decline and ultimate demise” (80). He concludes that philosophy fails “to acknowledge or understand the semiotic unconscious” and, thus, philosophical approaches to literary analyses “lack epistemological humility, the … ability to question the unconscious frame of reference that pre-determines [the philosophers’] conscious framing of the world” (93).

Nonetheless, focusing on Woolf’s novel Mrs Dalloway (Woolf 1925), this study will show that philosophical views can aid the analysis of semiotic signs in the novel, which then can generate discussions around both the conscious and unconscious behaviour of the characters. Therefore, philosophy can be considered an eligible means for the analysis of both the conscious and unconscious frames of the world a fictional milieu represents. The current study is based on Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’s philosophical view of discourse in the novel (Holquist 1981), and the analysis will focus on the female protagonist of the story, namely Clarissa Dalloway, through the lens of how characterization in Mrs Dalloway has been analysed by previous research in relation to the concepts of time and place.
In his discussions of how communication is reflected in literary works, Bakhtin makes a distinction between poetry and prose, in terms of language and how it is approached by poets and novelists inversely (Holquist 298). In poetry, language is characterized by unity, and the poet “writes in directly intentional language, one that means what he wants it to mean” (432). Using figurative language, Bakhtin argues that “the high poetic genres of any era exercise a centripetal – a homogenizing and hierarchizing – influence” due to their following formulaic rules and conventions (425). In prose, in contrast, several aspects of language, such as its diversity of voices, refract or modify meanings in diverse ways and “at different angles” (299-300). Bakhtin’s view of the novel is that it is a “de-normatizing and therefore centrifugal force” (425).

Refraction, heteroglossia, and chronotope are three concepts of central importance in Bakhtin’s philosophical view of the relationship between language and the novel (Holquist xiv). According to Bakhtin, “in novelistic prose one can trace” the “angle of refraction” in its discourse, “as [meaning] passes through various other voices” (432), connotations or undertones which complement the core meaning of the text. The associate meanings of words and utterances which appear in prose can be outlined by exploring multiple semiotic signs and concurrent multiple voices, such as intermediate characters’ acts which Bakhtin terms as “alien” (423), “speaking personalities” or “speech zones” (434). These multiple concurrent speech zones create heteroglossia, which has been defined in literary terms as “the existence of conflicting discourses within any field of linguistic activity”, such as a novel (Baldick 113). For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is the “base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance” (Holquist 428). Multiple voices affect what is uttered in a specific time and place, within specific linguistic environments and sociopsychological
circumstances, and which will have a different meaning if uttered in a different time and place, within diverse environments or circumstances (428). Therefore, for Bakhtin, time and place are interdependent, and it is this “connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” that the term chronotope describes (425). One definition of the term chronotope which derives from Bakhtin’s philosophy is that it refers “to the co-ordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative” or, in other words, the term refers to “the ‘setting’, considered as a spatio-temporal whole” (Baldivick 40).

This spatiotemporal whole is challenged in *Mrs Dalloway* since the narrative presents two ostensibly incongruent stories: that of Clarissa Dalloway, a fifty-two-year-old, elite Londoner preparing one of her usual successful parties, and that of Septimus Warren Smith, a young man who ends up committing suicide after his return from the World-War-I battlefields. Clarissa’s character is flanked by her first love Peter Walsh, whose feelings she discarded to marry the diplomat Richard Dalloway, and Sally Seton, Clarissa’s best friend. Throughout the plot, Septimus interacts exclusively with his wife Lucrezia (Rezia) and the doctors who see to his treatment. Past events of the story-line are revealed solely through representations of the characters’ remembrances, which fragmentedly signal their inner thoughts, emotions, and self-evaluations of their experiences. The action unfolds in one single summer-day of 1923 in London. Although the two protagonists are never introduced to each other throughout the plot, scholars have suggested that when Septimus commits suicide, the two characters eventually meet in a spatiotemporal sphere outside the physical setting (Brown 20), or even outside the text (Kuhlken 341-7). Following Albert Einstein’s theories of relativity, it has been suggested that Woolf “entangles time and topography” in *Mrs Dalloway* creating “a dynamic, interactive setting aligned with her characters’ thoughts” (Brown 20). The characters are
conceived to move and develop in a relative, physical setting, where they experience present time and social interaction while their remembrances bring their past experiences and old versions of their selves into the here and now of the story.

In fact, this interplay between time and place in Mrs Dalloway has generated diverse interpretations by scholars, via a rather wide spectrum of theoretical approaches, often not related to Bakhtin’s philosophy. For example, Cristina Delgado-García has identified a specific Woolfian technique which she connects to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept of the synchronic and diachronic axes: the synchronic axis refers to the representation of the characters’ self-definition through their social interactions at present time and place; the diachronic axis refers to the representation of the characters’ self-definition through their remembrances and the revisiting of their past (Delgado-García 17). The characters are suggested to carry two “coexisting selves” (21), the one experiencing and evaluating the present, and the other that preserves and re-enters past contemplations. Alternative analyses, such as Pam Fox Kuhlken’s, refer to “the objective, physical models of time” in Mrs Dalloway, in relation to the concepts of physical time (also referred to as “men’s time”) and psychological time (also referred to as “women’s time”), introduced by Julia Kristeva and Henri Bergson (Kuhlken 341, 345). What scholars have identified is the distinction between the characters’ development in the physical time and place of the story, and the ways that the characters’ imagination develops outside the physical setting. Kuhlken has proposed that the characters’ memories in Mrs Dalloway create a “new temporal dimension” and invite the readers to comprehend a hybrid “androgynous time” via the elasticity between physical and psychological margins (341-7), or in other words, androgynous time refers to a not definite distinction between physical and psychological time.
Through the lens of Bakhtin’s philosophy, Carol Bové observes that the “temporal nature of [a] text is structural as well as thematic”, and by “representing a material world that is not static, the text moves forward from one voice to another” (161). This is what Donna K. Reed terms as “merging voices” in *Mrs Dalloway*, and she suggests that Woolf’s work illustrates “the sloppy modes of thought and perception . . . that make boundaries fluid and allow things to flow into each other” (121). According to Cui Yaxiao’s linguistic approach to the novel, this “sense of simultaneity” contributes to the representation of multifaced consciousness, since the narrational style in *Mrs Dalloway* connects one character to the other, and the narrator’s point of view to the characters’ (175). As Reed notices, “it is not events that are woven together, but consciousnesses” (122).

The aim of this study is to show that Bakhtin’s philosophical view of discourse in the novel can help the analysis of *Mrs Dalloway* to develop further the concepts of androgynous time and synchronic and diachronic axes, as they are reflected in the novel, as well as the multivoicedness that has been identified in the text, in terms of what they all contribute to the interpretation of the female protagonist and the identification of the main meaning of the text. This study argues that by paying close attention to semiotic signs which indicate Clarissa’s conscious acts, the analysis can generate conclusions regarding the female protagonist’s unconscious behaviour. Although *Mrs Dalloway* seems to challenge the wholeness Bakhtin’s philosophy suggests, by means of Bakhtin’s concepts of refraction, heteroglossia and chronotope, the study concludes that the novel *Mrs Dalloway* can be analysed as a multifaceted whole, which functions, indeed, as centrifugal force.

**Refraction: The Meaning of One Word via the Surrounding Territory**
According to Judith Allen, it is not uncommon for Woolf’s work to draw attention to “multiple perspectives, diverse voices, a sense of awareness, involvement, critical thinking and critical reading” (117). In her work, Allen describes Woolf’s propositions that “we must be awake to the language, to how it functions and to placing ourselves outside, having some distance . . . so that we may truly ‘see’, in a new way” (Allen 115). These ideas can be interpreted as parallel to Bakhtin’s propositions that both direct and indirect meanings in discourse need to be taken into consideration in order for the audience to identify the main meaning of a text (Holquist 259-61). For Bakhtin, “every word is like a ray of light” which follows a specific path (432). This path, however, can be distorted or refracted by the paths that other words follow, creating what Bakhtin describes as “a semantic spectral dispersion” that occurs in “the occupied territory surrounding” a word (432). Bakhtin seems to call for an active reader who can identify dispersed meanings which combined can allow conclusions to be drawn in relation to what it is eventually that a text, as a multifaceted whole, conveys. By focusing on the introductory part of the novel, this section illustrates the way that the word herself, which appears in the very first page of the novel, can be interpreted via the exploration of its surrounding territory, namely other words and utterances present in the introductory scene. By exploring the ways that the meaning of herself is refracted, the analysis will show that following Bakhtin’s philosophical concept of refraction enables the identification of the main meaning of the scene, and it generates discussions in relation to Clarissa’s conscious interaction with the surrounding environment at the specific time and place, through the lens of the concepts of androgynous time and synchronic and diachronic axes already discussed in the previous section.
In the opening scene of the novel, the words appearing in the text instantly define the setting by framing the present moment with what precedes and what follows an implied, synchronic, physical action. In particular, the narration begins as follows: “Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming” (Woolf 3). Superficially, the text seems to suggest that the subject “Mrs Dalloway” is able to “buy the flowers herself” because Lucy (her maid) has appeared in the setting and possibly has cut out other household tasks “for” Clarissa (3), and not off her, for example. Additionally, the doors will be removed by Rumpelmayer’s workers, coming to prepare the setting for Clarissa’s party. In this case, second and third agents place Clarissa and her act in the central timeline of the narration. However, the synchronic physical action is implied by the text, and it can be identified as Clarissa’s opening the doors, entering the streets of London, given that the prementioned lines are complemented by the description of the “morning – fresh as if issued to children on the beach” (3), a metaphorical description of the setting outside the house in the beginning of the day. To put it simply, Lucy and the men could be seen as the intermediate characters-helpers who give the opportunity to the subject (Mrs Dalloway) to pick the object she desires (the flowers) by exiting the domestic environment. Nevertheless, the unfolding of Clarissa’s memories triggered the moment she opens the doors generates a totally different sequence of implications.

The passive construction used in the utterance “The doors would be taken off their hinges” (Woolf 3) indicates that the concrete nouns appearing in the sentence are offered emphasis in the text, signifying that these images are rather important for the story-telling. Indeed, all memories from Clarissa’s youth, which appear imminently when Clarissa opens the doors, are linked to the “little squeak of the hinges, which
she could hear now” (3). It is that specific sound in the “now” of the story that
reminds Clarissa of her young days “of eighteen” in the countryside, when “she had
burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air” (3).
Interpreted in physical time, the doors allow the character to progress from the
domestic environment into the outside-of-the-house space. In psychological time, the
doors allow the character to revisit her past through the memories triggered by the
sound of the hinges. Hence, iconic (squeak) and symbolic (doors) semiotic signs in
the text create this relative universe where the character meets the androgynous time
as critics have suggested (Brown 20; Kuhlken 341). What should not be neglected in
this case, however, is that Clarissa’s opportunity to experience this transition from
here and now to there and then has already been inconspicuously threatened in the
background, as the detailed analysis of additional semiotic signs, words, utterances
and punctuation will show.

The way that the passive construction is formed in the narrative shows that
Rumpelmayer’s men have a special role to play when seen as the agents of two
separate acts. A grammatically typical passive construction would require the agents
right after the passive form of the verb and its complementation, i.e. “The doors
would be taken off their hinges [by Rumpelmayer’s men]” (Woolf 3). In the text,
however, the agents are extracted from the passive construction by a semicolon, and
they become the subject of a complete, new sentence “Rumpelmayer’s men [are]
coming” (3) and, by extension, they become the agents who are attributed the power
of another act. When semantically analysed, [are] coming means that the agents are
about to enter the present physical setting. Pragmatically, it could indicate three main
directions of meaning: they are coming, and this is a good thing; they are coming, and
this is a bad thing; they are coming, and this is neither good nor bad, it is a neutral act.
When the men’s act is compared to Clarissa’s act, it is shown that the subjects move in opposite directions: the men are coming into and Clarissa is getting out of the domestic environment before the men appear. Although moving in opposite directions could be seen as not adding a special meaning to these characters’ acts – since no other properties regarding the characters’ relationship are offered in the text – when Clarissa’s feelings while she opens the doors are described, the text implies that the imminent arrival of the men would be rather unfortunate for the female protagonist.

Since Clarissa’s memories are triggered by the squeak of the hinges, had Rumpelmayer’s men removed the doors before her exit, Clarissa would have been deprived of the opportunity not only to enter the sphere of androgynous time via her remembrances, but to take control of the present moment as well. When Clarissa exits the domestic environment, she thinks: “What a lark! What a plunge!” and as the narrative describes “so it had always seemed to her” (Woolf 3). In other words, at the present moment, as is always the case for the character, Clarissa moves through the doors in vivacious motion, feeling like a bird allowed to exit a limited space so as to meet the open environment. Paradoxically, when Clarissa enters the public sphere of this fictional milieu, she enters a synchronic, physical space which enables the character to revive her diachronic characteristics, meaning her personality as it is defined by all her experiences, thoughts and feelings, avoiding exposure. For example, Clarissa meets intermediate characters, such as her neighbour Scrope Purvis, who know her “as one does know people who live next door” (3). This means that other characters identify Clarissa as the synchronic performer she projects outside her house: the “charming”, “vivacious”, and lively like a “jay” woman transforms into someone who “stiffen[s] a little on the kerb” (3), and moves “very upright” (4, 12), looking but “never seeing” (4). In this case, the verb *stiffens* signals the character’s
attempt to appear “very upright”, mentioned twice in the text (4, 12), and there seems to be a silent albeit conscious effort by Clarissa to present a synchronic, stabile external appearance. This effort can be characterised as successful since anything less stiff about Clarissa is seen as the result of an illness: she gives the sense of “a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza)” (4). In addition, the phrase never seeing comes as the opposition to how her young version is described to fully experience the surrounding environment by observing “the flowers . . . the trees . . . and the rooks rising [and] falling” (3). This means that the character indeed meets androgynous time and experiences the parallel development of her synchronic and diachronic selves. What is important in this case, however, is that her entering androgynous time does not justify Clarissa’s feelings of liberation: having entered the sphere of androgynous time, Clarissa is still deprived of the true feeling of being alive or active as one whole inside factuality since her personality remains divided in the physical world, and her old and current selves merge only outside the physical setting. What could be seen, however, as the justification to Clarissa’s liberating mood during her exit is her efficacious attempt to develop “herself” (3) at that specific time and place.

Retrospectively, when Clarissa decides to act “herself” (Woolf 3) it is construed as the only and immensely transient moment the character actually animates as a whole in this part of the story. While dichotomised, Clarissa’s vivacious diachronic self does not interrelate with the present physical world. In contrast, the animated performer that moves and develops in the synchronic axis is described as static, hollow and disconnected from all previous experiences: she is described as “a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause” (4); she “[knows] nothing; no language, no history . . . she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that. Her only
gift [is] knowing people almost by instinct” (8). Clarissa feels that she is wearing a meaningless hollow body which gives her “the oddest sense of being herself invisible”, even when she develops in the synchronic, physical world (10). Finally, as already mentioned, when the synchronic and diachronic selves merge in androgynous time, they merge outside physical time and thus outside the physical setting. Therefore, what could justify Clarissa’s feeling of liberation is not her transition per se, which still sets boundaries around her existence. It is rather her instantaneous, conscious decision to act herself and open the doors before the arrival of Rumpelmayer’s men, being already familiar with the redemptive feeling she would get in so doing (3). It is this act that offers the character the chance to develop as a dynamic, complete part of factuality, taking control of the moment.

To recapitulate, what this analysis has identified as the main act of this introductory scene, namely Clarissa’s opening the doors by her own volition, taking the chance to experience the familiar-to-her feeling of liberation, is signalled both indirectly and fragmentedly by the text. In order to identify the meaning of the word herself appearing in the very first sentence of the narrative, the analysis needed to focus on the linguistic environment surrounding the word, several semiotic signs such as punctuation and passive constructions, as well as the way that intermediate characters affect meaning and what the narrative communicates. Following Bakhtin’s concept of refraction, the word herself has been identified to signal the central or core meaning of the introductory scene, and the analysis permitted the identification of Clarissa’s conscious interaction with the setting, as a whole. The following sections of the analysis will show that in order to construe the female protagonist’s unconscious behaviour, the analysis needs to move away from this character as well, in order to investigate the wider social discourse that the character experiences, and the ways that
Clarissa’s conscious acts and positioning in the setting can be interpreted via Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia. As Carl Gustav Jung has suggested, “it is impossible” to interpret the unconscious state of a subject “unless we know what the conscious situation is” (21-2).

**Heteroglossia: Alien Zones in the Social Discourse of the Story**

In his review of Bakhtin’s work, John Fizer emphasizes Bakhtin’s suggestions that “the study of stylistics must be a simultaneous philosophical and sociological study of the work’s semantic components” (271). For Bakhtin, the novel is defined by “a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” in meaningful ways (Holquist 262). In the novel, each character’s speech is autonomous, both verbally and semantically (315). What the characters utter and how they act constitute the characters’ autonomous “speech zones”, which Bakhtin defines as spheres of influence and meaning which are interconnected, affecting one another (434). For Bakhtin, “all utterances are heteroglot” (263) in that they are based on what has already been uttered and what is already known (279). For that reason, heteroglossia affects to an important extent the meaning of what occurs under specific spatiotemporal, social, historical, and psychological conditions (236). Although in *Mrs Dalloway* verbal exchanges among characters are rare, the analysis presented in this section follows the semiotic signals which the public sphere of the novel’s discourse sends, so as to enable the investigation of the way that multiple speech zones may affect Clarissa’s attitude and the way that she moves and develops in public. This section shows that although the characters remain silent, there are ample semiotic signs in the text that compose the heteroglot; sounds, images, and intermediate characters’ appearance and attitude are all considered alien speech zones, which reveal the characteristics of the here and now and how they relate to the past.
The analysis also outlines Clarissa’s perception of the synchronic, social setting, and her synchronic performer is identified as part of factuality.

Similar to how the sound of the hinges has triggered Clarissa’s remembrances, her silent evaluations of the present time and place arise with the sound of Big Ben (Woolf 4), which has a double effect for the narrative. Stylistically, Big Ben functions as the semiotic sign which helps the transition from presenting Clarissa’s inner thoughts to describing the setting of the present moment as being populated by “the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on the doorsteps (drink their downfall)” (4). In-between the two edges of the textual transition, the text refers to the “leaden circles [of time] dissolved in the air” and presents adjacent clauses which repeat the pronoun it, i.e. “why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh” (4). The nouns that come before and after these clauses cannot be identified as the referents of it for either they appear in plural number, e.g. circles, or they denote concrete elements which could not be re-formulated, e.g. Big Ben (4). The only noun which appears in the close context and could be linked to what these clauses communicate is the abstract noun life (4), an abstract image possible to be (re)formulated by both time and people. Therefore, the text creates a symbolic connection between Big Ben as a solid artefact, the fluidity of time, and the formulated-by-people place.

In fact, Big Ben becomes the symbolic representation of the interrelationship amongst time, place, and the images and sounds which appear in the public discourse of the story. As the narrative suggests, when “Big Ben was beginning to strike”, first came “the warning, musical” and “then the hour, irrevocable” (Woolf 116). Given that Big Ben’s chimes sound as “warnings” of the “irrevocable” passing of time which “boom[s]” and dominates the place as a sound (4), the meanings of inflexibility
and unattractiveness blend in a way that the misery of the setting could be considered irreversible as well. Or, this could be how the narrative suggests that Clarissa’s conscious associates a public symbol with time, place and people. Nevertheless, Clarissa as well as other intermediate characters who exist in this fictional milieu are described as loving this environment because this is what constitutes life in the here and now of the story: “they love life”, “what [Clarissa] loved; life; London; this moment of June” (4), “what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her” (8-9). Insofar as Clarissa’s silent evaluations of the social setting are being presented, the text indicates that although she identifies aspects of its inflexibility and misery, she simultaneously grasps the idea that being part of factuality is her only way to experience life.

Throughout the plot, the narrative signals that Clarissa performs inside the public sphere of this fictional milieu in accordance with several alien zones that appear in the social discourse. As the introductory scene has suggested, Clarissa moves inside the public sphere “very upright” (Woolf 4, 12) attempting to stiffen her appearance (3). Similar semiosis appears at various points throughout the narration, describing not only Clarissa, but Peter, and other male and female intermediate characters as well: while at her previous parties Clarissa “stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of the stairs” (17); Peter strolls in the streets of London “[s]traightening himself and stealthily finger[ing] his pocket knife” (52); “[t]all men, men of robust physique . . . stood even straighter” (18); Mr Bowley “raised his hat . . . and stood very upright” (19); “a perfectly upright and stoical bearing” for “all men and women” (9) that not even Mrs Goates’s baby “lying stiff and white in her arms” (20) does not escape from. The references to Mr Bowley, Mrs Goates’s baby, and the anonymous men and women, all being alien speech zones which are not imperative
elements for the development of the story and the fact that no other properties about these characters are given throughout the plot, show that their presence in the text serves the indication of what public appearances look like in the social discourse of the story. It is this social discourse, as it is compiled by all these indirect semiotic signals or alien zones, which confirms that inflexibility defines appearances in this public milieu. In fact, it is suggested that the projected stiffness is performed by the following synchronic, alien speech zones: characters of white skin (i.e., the baby), high social status (i.e., a *Mr* and a *Mrs*), those who endure reality (i.e., the *stoical bearing*) hiding what could disturb this general public mood of stability (i.e., Peter playing with his pocket knife silently), and those who achieve prime via their stiffened posture (i.e., Clarissa on the top of the stairs when interpreted metaphorically, or the tall men with their imposing appearance). What is most intriguing in this case, however, is the fact that the stiffness which defines the social discourse in this fictional, after-war London is the reflection of another important alien zone: a group of soldiers who are presented during their parade inside the synchronic, physical setting.

In contrast to previously-analysed parts of the text that emphasize sound, the passage describing the soldiers focuses on visual semiosis and creates a symbolic link between public appearances and established ideas, realized as diachronic voices, levied remains of the past. The young soldiers “in uniform, carrying guns”, who march “with their eyes ahead of them” and “their arms stiff” (Woolf 50), bring into the present setting images of war even though the war is over in the now of the story. As it is suggested by the words appearing in the text, the soldiers’ parade stands symbolically as the continuation of time-honoured conceptualisations, since the soldiers’ facial expressions are described “like the letters of a legend written round the
base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (50). Here, the text intimates that traditions mark the soldiers’ faces like imprinted masks, and their bodies are described as stiffened, lifeless statues which, both paradoxically and ironically, are connected emotionally to the system.

In addition, the text communicates the notion that not only is inflexibility reflected on public appearances, but the characters Clarissa encounters in the social setting do not experience the real essence of life which is buried underneath the stiffened surface. As the narrative suggests, the crowd, showing respect to the soldiers, stop and stare at the parade (Woolf 50-1), and, connotatively, at what the soldiers stand for as a symbol: the already described interrelationship between authority and loyalty or love to traditions. Nonetheless, when the word life appears in the text, it is described as being “laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline” (51). Since the notions of stiffness and hollowness have already been attached to animated characters by the narrative (3, 10, 17, 20, 50), the “stiff yet staring corpse” (51) can be perceived as referring to the crowd admiring the soldiers. In this case, “by” discipline (51) seems to be what the narrative distinguishes as the source of the crowd’s appearance and attitude. Additionally, the fact that this life is “drugged into” people (51) generates the idea that the public undergo an intoxicating experience which could be interpreted as being imposed on them by indirect, diachronic speech zones, interpreting the passive form of the verb-phrase. Hence, the social discourse is presented to mirror an inflexible, unhealthily imposed continuation of settled ideas and conceptualizations, realized by heteroglossia and how diachronic alien zones are reflected on the synchronic speech zones.
The fact that the public follow a specific, inflexible and unattractive, social discourse, is verified by the speech zones of the characters who are not familiar with these social conventions, and who fail to familiarise themselves with the environment. For instance, Maisie Johnson, who is part of the action only once and very briefly in the novel, is a young girl who has come to London for the first time, to work for her uncle (Woolf 25). Experiencing the social discourse in this fictional London, Maisie is filled with horror and hopelessness experiencing an unfamiliar microcosm, which she tenaciously describes as strange and hostile, and men, women, London, “the stone basins” and “the prim flowers”, everyone and everything seem “very queer” (25-6). In addition, being an outsider Rezia, Septimus’s wife, attempts to decode factuality by giving meanings to things that happened” (82) albeit unsuccessfully. For instance, although she observes every woman that passes in front of her, Rezia fails to comprehend women’s appearance and attitude in London: “Ill-dressing, over-dressing she stigmatised, not savagely, rather with impatient movements of the hands, like those of a painter who puts from him some obvious well-meant glaring imposture” (87). Rezia’s attempt is to create images which could help her identify the surrounding setting. Still, when the text presents her nostalgic feelings of Italy, her homeland, it is shown that Rezia identifies two different worlds: “Far was Italy . . . and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here . . . looking at a few ugly flowers stuck in pots!” (23). She feels the need to buy some roses although they were “almost dead already” (93), signalling her inner desire to follow what she observed to be the norm in the setting, or this is her attempt to own something from it so as to feel part of factuality. Regardless of her inner desires and attempts, however, she feels uninvited and fails to communicate with other characters throughout the plot: “For you should see the
Milan gardens,’ she said aloud. But to whom? There was nobody . . . I am alone; I am alone! She cried” (23). Rezia’s feeling of despair substantiates the idea that even those who succeed in identifying the characteristics of this social discourse find its dominant conventions unattractive and incomprehensible.

To put it in a nutshell, following what the alien zones which appear in the social discourse of the story communicate, the analysis identified some of the main characteristics of the public sphere of this fictional milieu. In particular, the social setting has been identified as an inflexible and unattractive continuation of the voices coming from the past, and characters who are not familiar with social conventions experience fear and isolation developing among stiffened, hollow, and incomprehensible subjects. Having set some standards around the conscious frame of this fictional world and what is Clarissa’s perception of it, the analysis will now return to Clarissa’s character in an attempt to identify what her positioning inside this setting is, in more detail, what can be some possible explanations of her attitude as part of this social whole, and eventually, how this character can be interpreted when she is construed as a separate, private whole inside the bigger, social frame.

Chronotope: The Spatiotemporal Whole in Clarissa’s (Un)Consciousness

In Bakhtin’s philosophy, space “becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Holquist 84) and, therefore, the relationship between place and time is characterized as interdependent. According to Julia Briggs, as a novelist Woolf was “intensely aware of time, both as an impersonal force and as a personal experience . . . as the regulated and measurable time of clocks, public and private” (125). Annalee Edmondson has proposed that Mrs Dalloway challenges the binary opposition between public and private spaces, although it has been suggested that “Woolf’s text evinces . . . an individual’s ‘private’ world as defined apart from other
subjects” (17). This last section of this study shows that there is a distinction between public and private spaces in *Mrs Dalloway* since appearances inside the public setting are, indeed, constructed. Where public and private spheres blend and create a whole, however, is the fact that their interpretations are interdependent: the one affects and is affected by the other and, hence, the one can be construed through the light of the other. Having set the criteria around what constitutes the public sphere, or namely the conscious frame of this fictitious world, this section seeks to explore Clarissa’s unconscious, aiming at the interpretation of this character as the whole her synchronic and diachronic selves form when added together, following Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope.

Throughout the text, Clarissa is presented as contemplating how strategic performance in the synchronic, public milieu must be a vital priority for one and all, not for reasons of vanity but rather for self-protection. As the narrative suggests, “she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day” (Woolf 8), and “it was silly to have other reasons for doing things . . . but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew” (10). Since physically Clarissa exists in this fictional world, these lines are interpreted as emphasizing Clarissa’s attitude to keep her diachronic self detached from factuality, wrapping it up with the synchronic self’s body, aiming at self-preservation. The character contemplates that it would be not wise for someone to perform otherwise, meaning to let their inner selves be exposed in front of the public eye. She herself evaluates the environment and modifies her attitude depending on the moment and whom she shares the environment with, acting either defensively or tamely: “If you put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat’s; or she purred” (8). For Clarissa, all “moments . . . are buds on the tree of life” (29) and she prefers to experience London than the country-side (5)
for, as her inner thoughts verify, she feels “perfectly happy” when she knows what it is that she has to “defend herself” from (120). In other words, Clarissa feels happy when she is able to act correspondingly to all “buds” (29), realized as alien zones and semiotic signs which the character identifies and evaluates while experiencing the social setting.

Throughout the plot, Peter’s memories verify that this attitude is typical for Clarissa, although he seems unable to identify what drives Clarissa’s synchronic performance. In particular, the narrative suggests that it is “her perfect manners” and “her social instinct” that Peter has always admired (Woolf 61). During her party, he observes how she “escorted her Prime Minister down the room”, wearing her accessories and refined garments, “prancing”, “sparkling”, moving and laughing “with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element”, “having this gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed” (173). In an attempt to “explain [Clarissa]”, however, Peter believes that “[t]he obvious thing to say of her” is that she “care[s] too much for rank and society and getting on in the world”, and she contemplates that “people ha[ve] no right to slouch about with their hands in their pockets; must do something, be something” (76). Here, the narrative suggests that Peter’s perception around Clarissa’s attitude is related to the way he thinks Clarissa discriminates by social differences. Convinced as he is that Clarissa “hated frumps, fogies, failures, like himself presumably” (76), Peter does not identify the possibility that were Clarissa to utter such propositions, she would probably refer to somebody’s positioning in factuality, and not their position. That is the reason why when Clarissa in her turn evaluates Peter’s deeds, she suggests that he did not have “the ghost of an idea of solving”; he could not realize “simply this: here was a room; there another” (127), meaning the necessity of identifying moments and
environments, and thus modify moods, attitudes and appearances accordingly, as she
does rather efficaciously and on more than one level.

On a social level, Clarissa’s appearance functions as a consciously articulated
shield against misery, which helps the character to detain her diachronic self veiled at
the same time. Her soft, shiny, made of silk evening-dresses, which she mends
carefully using “her silks, her scissors . . . [and] her thimble” (Woolf 37, 38), create a
contrast between Clarissa and the “frumps sitting on the doorsteps” (4), or the
“laughing girls in their transparent muslins who . . . were taking their absurd woolly
dogs for a run” (5). In the previous lines, the notions of misery and the absurd are
associated with what these women wear and how they position themselves inside the
public sphere, in contrast to Clarissa’s appearance and stiffened posture. The fact that
Clarissa moves and dresses in a different-than-these-women’s way creates a symbolic
distance between Clarissa and the notions of misery and the absurd. More particularly,
Clarissa has chosen for her important party a dress made by Sally Parker, who “was a
character, thought Clarissa, a real artist”, whose dresses “were never queer. You could
wear them at Hatfield; at Buckingham Palace. She had worn them at Hatfield; at
Buckingham Palace” (38). Although there are no other properties given in the text for
Sally Parker, Clarissa is presented to have chosen a dress made by a woman who has
been moving within the higher social circles. The way that Clarissa identifies Sally
Parker as “a character” and “a real artist” (38) signals that Clarissa identifies in Sally
Parker a performer who probably knows prime appearances well. In fact, as the
narrative suggests, Clarissa identifies this garment as an artefact which shines “by
artificial light” but loses its colour “in the sun” (37), meaning that it functions as a
cloak which covers something less attractive or less acceptable that lies underneath,
and which could be revealed outside the shadow. This is probably the reason why
Clarissa gets upset when she is “interrupted at eleven o’clock on the morning” (39) by Peter’s unexpected visit before she has finished mending a torn part of the dress. She instantly “make[s] to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy” (39). Clarissa’s attempt, here, is interpreted as the synchronic self’s attempt to protect the diachronic self, by not revealing what a tear on the surface could show: non-normative characteristics, regardless of their nature. Or, this could be her attempt not to let Peter apprehend that her usual appearance is carefully constructed. In addition, when Clarissa returns home from her morning walk in the streets of London, she utters: “Fear no more . . . the heat of the sun”, and when Lucy is given Clarissa’s parasol, she is treating it “like a sacred weapon which a Goddess, having acquitted herself honourably in the field of battle” (29), returns in her own private space. In the previous utterances, the streets of London are described as battlefields, and the sun is interpreted as the light which Clarissa is terrified of while she develops in the public setting.

On the more private level, the text signifies that garments and accessories are for Clarissa her means to join ostensibly private, long-established traditions as well. Initially, when Clarissa visits the streets of London, the narrative signals her alleged love for accessories, such as the “sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings” and the diamonds which embellish the windows of the shops and which “she, too” loves (Woolf 5). While at Bond Street, however, Clarissa’s remembrances bring to this materialistic present her father’s material possessions and her uncle’s suggestions that trimmings define identity: “the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on the iceblock” (10); “her old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves . . . Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves” (11). In other words, the narrative intimates that material
possessions are for Clarissa the continuation of “old” (11) family traditions and attitude, realized as diachronic, private alien zones. The fact that Clarissa feels a weightiness of a long-established connection to the elite is supported by the narrative’s suggestion that “her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, [and] she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party” (5). In this study, the phrase *her people* is interpreted either as a reference to Clarissa’s family-history which could link the character to a long family-tradition of being part of the elite, or it could be a hint that Clarissa identifies members of the elite as members of a group she also belongs to, due to her being the wife of Richard Dalloway, a well-recognized member of the elite, who “was mad of [the finest] material” (103). In this case, the idea that social positioning is imposed on Clarissa via her social status, and not because this would be a priority for the character, could be strengthened. Either way, there is a solid, diachronically imposed link between Clarissa and the upper social ranks. Thus, it can be assumed that garments and accessories complement Clarissa’s stiffened posture as the means the character utilizes to assert prime continuing consciously private, long-established family traditions, or social norms imposed on a private level.

Finally, both the narration and Clarissa’s inner thoughts verify that her upcoming, important party is for Clarissa her means to offer to people the opportunity to coexist and communicate at a place other than the public sphere of the social setting. “Speaking aloud, to life” when she is alone in private, Clarissa explains: “‘That’s what I do it for,’ (120); “life [is] all plain sailing” (121) and, as the narrative describes, “she was not enjoying” her party, “it was too much of an effort” (169). What Clarissa aims at is not to enjoy herself, but to offer to people a spatiotemporal sphere where they could be “unreal in one way; much more real in another” (169).
The party would be an opportunity for all guests to be “taken out of their ordinary ways”, in a private space where “it was possible to say things you couldn’t say anyhow else, . . . [things] possible to go much deeper” (170); it would be their opportunity to communicate on a level beneath the stiffened surface and away from the inflexible, hollow and unattractive public sphere. What is interesting, however, is the fact that Clarissa deprives her own self of this opportunity to be “unreal” and, paradoxically enough, “more real” (169), stating that this was not the right time for her to do so: “But not for her; not yet anyhow” (170). Her attitude, here, is explained by Clarissa’s silent monologue, as it is described in the final part of the novel, after she is informed that a “young man had killed himself” (183).

The news of Septimus’s suicide triggers Clarissa’s final, private, fragmented monologue which reveals her perception of death, and which explains her “terror” (184) and hesitation to allow herself, as one whole, to experience what could be the “more real” (169) underneath the stiffly constructed, synchronic, social performance. When Clarissa hears the news about Septimus’s death, the text clarifies that, for Clarissa, death is a “defiance” to stiffness, probably an ultimate attempt for real communication by those who feel “the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them” (183). Septimus’s suicide is announced at Clarissa’s party by his doctor Sir William Bradshaw, “a great doctor” who Clarissa identifies as “evil, without sex or lust . . . capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your soul . . . with his power”, making life “intolerable” (183-4). Taking into consideration the findings the analysis presented in the previous sections, this description generates the idea that the doctor is for Clarissa the representation of the previously described hollow and unreal public appearances whose power dominates the social discourse. With hindsight, Clarissa’s decision to exclude herself from experiencing the more real
can be interpreted as her conscious decision to detain her normative appearance so as to serve the rest of the crowd as the one who could keep the balance between what is expected and what is real, via her strategically articulated appearance. Her unconscious, however, identifies the powerful imposition of the constructed reality, which entities such as doctor Bradshaw represent, and which has invaded her party. The fact that the unreal hollowness of the public settings has appeared at her party could be for Clarissa the verification of her strongest fear: “her disaster – her disgrace” (184), her failure to be the “perfect hostess” (7), unable to preserve the conditions that would allow people to be “more real” in the spatiotemporal sphere she created for them with her party. That is the reason why she “felt glad that [Septimus] had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (185). Septimus is in Clarissa’s unconscious the one and only person that eventually managed to communicate and be “more real” (169) on the day of her party.

Conclusively, Clarissa is identified as a character who is cognizant that appearances and the real essence of life are two distinct notions. She consciously adapts to the environment under the pressure of hereditary, social and private, synchronic and diachronic conceptualizations, and due to her fear to reveal her complete self out in the open. As a dynamic whole, she develops in this fictional milieu only indirectly, seeking to offer to Londoners the opportunity to escape the constructed, unreal-real world via her party. However, unconsciously she is aware that conventions are of great power and that death could be the one pathway leading to real communication, outside the unreal factuality.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to show that Bakhtin’s philosophical views of discourse in the novel can serve the analysis of both the conscious and unconscious frames of the
fictional world presented in Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway*, even though the novel seems to challenge the wholeness Bakhtin’s philosophy proposes. The analysis, being based on Bakhtin’s concepts of refraction, heteroglossia and chronotope, developed in relation to the concepts of androgynous time and synchronic and diachronic axes, or the ways that characterisation in *Mrs Dalloway* has been analysed by previous research in relation to time and place. The study showed that the analysis of semiotic signs in the novel helped the revelation of the female protagonist’s conscious acts and contemplations, which indicated her unconscious interpretation of the environment in which she develops. The study concludes that the novel *Mrs Dalloway* can be analysed as a multifaceted whole, which functions, indeed, as centrifugal force. Moving away from the main character, the analysis was able to identify her synchronic and diachronic characteristics, as well as her perception of the environment she experiences, as one whole. The analysis showed that conclusions are possible when Clarissa is realized as a whole that develops consciously inside the synchronic setting, when it is seen as the reflection of diachronic conceptualisations which her unconscious identifies, evaluates, fears, and attempts to protect herself from.
Works Cited


