

## **NEW HISTORICIST IMPLICATIONS IN WOOLF’S MODERNIST ART WITH REFERENCE TO *Mrs. Dalloway***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a novel whereby Woolf experimenting with the modernist techniques broke with all the traditional rules of novel writing, offers new ways of analysis when it is approached in a new historicist perspective. However, this study is not committed to an all-inclusive new historicist analysis of the novel; rather it aims to make connections between some of the modernist aspects of the novel and some assumptions and practices of new historicism by means of relying on the striking resemblances between Woolf’s art reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway* and new historicist theories. For this reason, in this essay, Woolf’s novel is argued to have been written with a new historicist consciousness and to include some theories in New Historicism though New Historicism did not emerge during the time in which the novel was written, i.e. before the coinage of New Historicism by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982. Then the immediate purpose of this study is to foreground these remarkable similarities which are believed to offer, through the new historicist perspective, new readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* as extensions of this study.

**Keywords:** Modernism, *Mrs. Dalloway*, New Historicism, Virginia Woolf.

*I am a part of all that I have met;*  
Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses”

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel whereby Virginia Woolf broke with traditional ways of novel writing. When the novel is approached in a new historicist perspective, it promises fruitful contextual analyses with its biographical, social, cultural and historical values, with which it is embedded and by means of which it was produced. However, this study is not committed to such new historicist readings of the novel; rather it tries to make connections between Woolf’s modernist art and New Historicism. Then the purpose of this paper is to detect the new historicist

implications in *Mrs. Dalloway*, though it was published a long time ago as 1925, i.e. fifty-seven years before the emergence of New Historicism as a critical approach. Then the paper argues that Woolf wrote this novel with a new historicist consciousness; and so Woolf's modernist art has some parallels with some of the theories and practices in New Historicism. Foregrounding the similarities between Woolf's modernist art and techniques presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* and new historicist assumptions and practices, the study is believed to offer new readings of the novel through the lens of New Historicism.

## **2. A VERY SHORT NOTE ON NEW HISTORICISM**

Since the coinage of New Historicism in 1982 by the founder and leading representative of New Historicism Stephen Greenblatt, the theory has gained a rather rhizomatic nature and multifarious practices. Despite its being an elastic collection of practices, New Historicism as a way of reading texts and history has had, from the beginning, its distinguishing qualities on which Greenblatt set firmly the ways of analyzing literary texts as historical and cultural texts and history as narratives. New Historicist Criticism insists that in order to interpret a literary text, it should be put into its biographical, social, cultural and historical contexts because it is a product of the ideas and/or values circulating at time and in a social and cultural milieu. Among the other tenets of New Historicism are its not distinguishing literature and history as separate realms by means of drawing attention to their fictional, narrative nature, its challenging New Criticism, Russian Formalism and its extension Structuralism in respect of their interpretative process assuming the literary text as a complete form in itself, an autotelic artifact and thus detaching it from any extrinsic matters, its proposing a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, its acceptance of all the literary works as cultural texts residing in a cultural network and intersecting with each other, and its demythologizing the monolithic unifying worldviews through creating an awareness that they are actually fashioned to serve the powers, hegemony or authority and legitimized via refashioning in the cultural works. New Historicism also argues that cultural artifacts sometimes participate in the discourses refashioning the worldview via both being the instruments of powers and naturalizing the view(s) imposed by that power, and that they sometimes subvert power through deconstruction with regard to its acceptance of the idea that power produces its own subversion. However, this subversion may reinforce the power if it is not a genuine one.

New Historicism's eroding the line between literature and history both distinguishes itself from the old historicism and constitutes its common ground. In contrast with the traditional approaches to literature and history making a certain distinction between these two areas, New Historicism insists on the "the historicity of text and textuality of history" (Montrose, 1989:20). This new outlook to history is a dictum by Louis Montrose and becoming the key concern of

new historicist critics Montrose famous and groundbreaking dictum contributed much to the new historicist analyses of literary texts and history. By “*the historicity of text*”, Montrose (1989:20) means, as he himself asserts, “the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing – not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them”. With “*the textuality of history*” Montrose (1989:20) suggests that we can have “no access to a full and authentic past, a lived and material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question”. By means of Montrose’s historicizing texts and textualizing history, text has become an event and history a text. With its acceptance of literature as something that has power to shift and shape the cultural and social constructions, to constraint and resist the hegemony and to alter even the orthodoxy seeming unquestionable and unalterable, New Historicism proposes “the historicity of text”. The other counterpart of Montrose’s dictum, “the textuality of history” foregrounds the fictionality and narrativity of the historical discourse. This, by the same token, implies the subjectivity of the historian, which gives a freedom of choice to the historian in making a selection among the historical events and materials and in the attitude he adopts in reflecting them in the historical discourse. The historical writing resulting from such an arbitrary and subjective choice, no one can claim its objectivity. Therefore, the historian is accepted to study just like, for example, a novelist; s/he does nothing more than narrating. What affects both of them actually is their historicity.

In 1985 Jerome J. McGann (1985:63) denounced the new trend in literary analysis in his *Beauty of Inflections*:

literary analysis is tantamount to establishing the hegemony of historical method to literary studies in general. This is not say that more specialized literary investigations should be discouraged; quite the contrary. But it is to say that the governing context of all literary investigations must ultimately be an historical one. Literature is a human product, a humane art. It cannot be carried on (created), understood (studied), or appreciated (experienced) outside of its definitive human context. The general science governing that human context is socio-historical.

Greenblatt’s “abjurations” which he lists in his article “The Circulation of Social Energy”, which is a new historicist analysis of English theatre in the Elizabethan Period, may be taken as initial principles of New Historicism. They are as follows:

1. There can be no appeals to genius as the sole origin of the energies of great art.
2. There can be no motiveless creation.
3. There can be no transcendent or timeless or unchanging representation.

4. There can be no autonomous artifacts.
5. There can be no expression without an origin and an object, a from and for.
6. There can be no art without social energy.
7. There can be no spontaneous generation of social energy (Greenblatt, 1988:12).

New Historicism's recognition of culture as a network of signs is of primary importance in its recognition of literary texts or artistic productions in general as cultural artifacts and the products of particular historical conditions and in its assuming the individual and the artist as cultural constructions. Its rejection of the originality and uniqueness of the author's mind and imagination (because the author's imagination with its aspirations, inspirations and materials is accepted as a cultural and social construction), its rejection of history as something lying outside the text and mirrored in the text objectively, and its offering synchronic reading of the texts, whether be literary or not, belonging to the same episteme constitute the mainstream characterizing New Historicism.

### **3. NEW HISTORICIST IMPLICATIONS IN *MRS. DALLOWAY***

There can be found many new historicist echoes in Woolf's art with reference to her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. *Mrs. Dalloway* bears an important implication of New Historicism with regard to its innovations as a modernist novel and its impacts on the novel form. The novel's bearing modernist qualities proves the idea that it was shaped by the culture in which it was written and, thus it can be analysed through the lens of New Historicism. Generally speaking, written in 1923 and 1924 and published in 1925, *Mrs. Dalloway* is of significance with regard to its being the first among Virginia Woolf's nine novels to employ the modernist qualities both technically and thematically. Though it comes in fourth in Woolf's order of writing her novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* is regarded to be "the first completely successful novel in her new style" (Abrams et.al., 1986:1987). Along with her later novels *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931), *Mrs. Dalloway* has been recognized by the critics as "the centre of her work, the heart of her contribution to Modernism" (Bradbury, 1994:186) and a novel which "did break the mold of the novel" (Miller, 2006:153). It is certainly the case that it has a privileged position in Woolf's nine novels because Woolf experimented with many new techniques in writing it. *Mrs. Dalloway* is in contrast with the traditional realistic novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its not resembling the previous traditional realistic novels and its bearing innovations of Modernism bring into mind that Woolf problematizing the formal and thematic concerns of the novel written especially in the Edwardian period had to set up new methods in writing *Mrs. Dalloway* and thus she had the role of a counter-novelist to the authors of the traditional novels. Woolf (1982:51) herself wrote in a letter in her *Diary*: "In this book [Mrs. Dalloway] I practice writing. I do my scales". In

another letter she describes her writing process: “I think the design is more remarkable than in any of my books [...] I am stuffed with ideas for it. I feel I can use up everything I’ve ever thought” (Woolf, 1982:46), and she calls it “the tunneling process” (Woolf, 1982:47). Woolf’s place in literary history, her contributions to fiction, her having being shaped and her development as a novelist may be studied together with her wish to create novel ideas about fiction and apply them to the novelistic art. Woolf as a fiction writer “rebelled against what she called the ‘materialism’ of novelists such as her contemporaries Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, who depicted suffering and social injustice through gritty realism, and she sought to render more delicately those aspects of consciousness in which she felt the truth of human experience lay” (Abrams et al., 1986:1987). Both as a novelist and a critic she “persistently explored and experimented with the boundaries of literary convention in order to express more fully the qualities and intensity of conscious experience” (Parsons, 2007:1). In her *Diary*, she recorded in a letter dated Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>: “I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant “novel.” A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what?” (Woolf, 1982). Parsons (2007: 15) taking righteously Woolf’s modernist art along with those of James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson points out that

each felt that the novel had reached a moment of crisis, its generic conventions out of date and irrelevant for the expression of the character and conditions of a new age; each shared a heightened awareness of the disjunction between social action or language and internal states of consciousness; and each was committed to the belief that art could reveal the ‘truth’ beneath our familiar assumptions about the look and feel of reality.

Then Woolf’s searching for the new modes of writing, her rejection of materialism and realism of the Edwardian novels, her ways of reflecting the new kind of reality – a reality which is subjective and was believed to be residing in the inner worlds and minds of the individual rather than the external world, and which is momentary and fragmented – and her particular aesthetics were all affected by the modern world and worldview. Woolf (2000:746) contends in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” that “on or about December, 1910, human character changed”, therefore “all human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910”. As a writer, Woolf “seeing the world as a globe which constantly moved and tilted with each successive age, [...] sought the emotional perspective by which the reality of this new era could be viewed” because “it was a world in which time, space, and motion had been split. Human figures were reduced to essence or outline, or given multiple personality” (Richter, 1970:3-4). Shortly, the author had to change the ways of seeing and reflecting reality because reality was not considered to be objective anymore, truth was not universal; and if

human character was changed, so must the form of the novel. If we approach these ideas through the new historicist standpoint, we come up with the argument that Woolf as an author was shaped by culture which she was born into and she lived in. In other words, what determined the artistic problems Woolf had to deal with was the cultural and social milieu in which she wrote, and as such, the driving force behind Woolf's modernism must have been the conviction that the prevailing methods and techniques of novel writing were insufficient for the need of a modernist writer like Woolf. Woolf as an artist felt that the modern world required different kinds of art. Schwarz (1989:21) also argues that Woolf had to "discover an appropriate form" with which to show such striking characteristics of the period as that "motives could not be fully understood, that the world was not created and shaped by divine providence, that chance might determine man's destiny, that man's desires and aspirations were not likely to be fulfilled, that social institutions were ineffectual, and that materialism and industrialization were destroying the fabric of life". It is because of this reason that *Mrs. Dalloway* reflects disorder, flux, discontinuity, fragmentations, and disruption. But this should not be taken to mean, however, that Woolf's novel is simply the product of its time and place. It is apparent that there was a reverse affect of the previous modes of novel writing on Woolf's new modes of novel writing. In other words, the prevailing fashions in novel writing were discarded by Woolf, and, as such, her way of writing novel is not typical of that of the time. Her way of writing novel took the opposite way and so it changed the route of the novel. This may be attributable to her novel's capacity to be embedded in the cultural values and to transcend its cultural moment at one and the same time. It is also worth noting that *Mrs. Dalloway* as a modernist novel must have affected the concept of reality of the subsequent novels and the society's sense of reality. Hence it can be asserted that Woolf's novel is not merely a reflection of the context in which it was produced; it also took an active part in a particular historical moment, in this case, in the emergence and development of the modernist novel. Jean Howard's (1986:25) assertion that in New Historicism literature is accepted "as an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality" verifies this quality of *Mrs. Dalloway*. If we take the traditional realistic novel as canonical with regard to those times, what Woolf did with the writing of such a modernist novel as *Mrs. Dalloway* was to subvert the canon – though she could not find a new name to substitute "novel" – her novel has exactly a more diverse line than that of the canonical novels of those times; *Mrs. Dalloway* is a genuine subversion of the novels with materialistic line. It changed something in the literary context. Woolf's novel is then proves a new historicist conviction that literature is not something that is simply produced by history rather it is the agent making history. In the realm of literary history *Mrs. Dalloway* has been accepted among the first modernist novels in English Literature along with those of Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson. This aspect of *Mrs. Dalloway* can be associated with a new historicist conviction that a literary text reflects the historical forces that shaped it initially. This approach assumes, as Davis and

Schleifer (1998:457) assert, that “a historical moment – enormously complex in its diverse representations – produces the factors that shape a particular work of literary art. This approach projects the historical process itself as the instigator and actual shaper of all dimensions of culture, a kind of ultimate author, both the origin and real composer of specific works, too. A new historicist reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* would be able to assess and appreciate Woolf’s ability to find out new techniques in novel writing. It would also demonstrate the factors that made possible *Mrs. Dalloway* and how Woolf’s innovations and experiments took shape in harmony with the change in society and against the literary canon.

*Mrs. Dalloway* may be analyzed putting it in both the cultural and biographical contexts. Woolf’s biography may present to the new historicist critic a fruitful area of investigation to make connections between the modern life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – which Woolf, as a novelist, was exposed to as the other people living in a changing and chaotic world were – and Woolf’s methods of writing, for example, her stream-of consciousness technique, her use of free indirect discourse, her revelation of the individual’s conscious and unconscious mind, her interweaving past and present, her depiction of the experience as fragmented, momentary, multiple and limitless, and her emphasis on not how one lives but rather how life is perceived by one. Harvena Richter’s (1970: vii) pointing out the psycho-physical totality of the self and the means by which to express it in Woolf’s novels may help understand the transaction between Woolf and Zeitgeist and the necessity of Woolf’s reconstruction of the fictional worlds envisaged by the consciousness of characters:

An aura of emotional awareness drawn from the entire being, consciousness is more than a stream associated ideas and feelings: it is a part of a complex synthesis of the individual’s total response to life. We may call this a sense of *lived reality*, and the modes by which Virginia Woolf shows it are those by which man himself experiences this reality. Using principles of perception and mind function, she seeks to approximate the actual ways in which man sees, feels, thinks, and experiences time and change.

Woolf’s concepts of reality and of time reflected in her novels, then, may be tied with the time in which Woolf lived. Thus it could be revealed that the current concepts of time and reality were less likely to be suitable to Woolf’s aims as a modernist writer of fiction, and thus she had to transform her “relation with and representation of reality” (Parsons, 2007:11) and invent new modes writing. “The transaction from the old to the new, from a stable world dealing with in absolutes to one committed to the present moment of feeling” (Richter, 1970:6) was, in a sense, visualized by Woolf in her novels. Briefly, it would not be wrong to take Woolf’s novel ideas in writing fiction and her art as a novelist as the outcomes of the current position of the novel as a genre and as an urgent need of a modernist writer to respond to the changing times and thus to

define Woolf as a culturally and socially constructed author; in this context, her concern with the nature and status of fiction can be seen to have been culturally formed and to be indispensable to the temperament of her time.

As mentioned partially previously, one of the striking similarities found in Woolf's modernist art and New Historicism is their conception and presentation of reality. For Woolf, human reality cannot be found in the external; rather it resides in the inward life. "The once-prevailing nineteenth-century notions of ordinary reality came under serious attack" (Greenblatt and Abrams, 2006:1838) by Woolf in her "Modern Fiction". She explicitly directed her assaults against "the materialism of the realistic Edwardian heirs of Victorian naturalist confidence, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy" (Greenblatt and Abrams, 2006:1838). By "materialism" Woolf (2000:740) means that "they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body" and that "they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring". For Woolf (2000:740), H. G. Wells is "a materialist in the sense that he takes too much delight in the solidity of his fabric. His mind is too generous in its sympathies to allow him to spend much time in making things shipshape and substantial". In Woolf's view, reality is something that can be found in the conscious and subconscious mind, in the individual's moments of perception. For Woolf what is knowable and representable is not "out there as some given, fixed, transcribable essence" (Greenblatt and Abrams, 2006:1838). Reality exists when it is perceived by the individual; so reality is subjective, changing, and momentary; it is not objective and transhistorical. Likewise a relative and transient reality bound to historical and cultural conditions is acclaimed by New Historicism. For both Woolf and new historicists, reality is itself a construct, it is also contextual. A new historicist critic is always at pains, in his survey of literary texts to show what monolithic worldview is contained in the work or through what outlook(s) it has taken its shape. A historical document or a discourse or writing might have been produced, according to the new historicists, in relevance with and in order to support the realities imposed by an ideology or worldview. What a new historicist does with regard to the realities reflected in both literary and non-literary texts is to re-situate the given reality to search for or present a new reality. In other words, they try to dig some other realities out. This pursuit of the new historicist critic might be thought to correspond with Woolf's not satisfying with the seeming realities and her urge to depict a series of realities, which is connected with the depiction of a multiplicity of mindset instead of a monolithic worldview in order to create multivocality/polyphony in her novel instead of monophony. By means of the depiction of the inner worlds of her characters and the flowing thoughts in their minds through the stream of consciousness technique, what Woolf does is to give the subjective, inner, changing realities. As it is known, sometimes associated with the interior monologue stream of consciousness is a technique in literature which depicts the various thoughts and feelings passing through the minds

of the characters. Seeking to record the flow of impressions passing through a character's mind, the authors of the stream of consciousness novel assume that the significant existence of man can be found in his mind, in the thoughts and feelings that pass through his mind, rather than in the outside world and that the thoughts and feelings in one's mind do not follow any logical and chronological pattern, they are determined by free psychological associations. For these writers, stream of consciousness technique "was a fresh weapon in the struggle against intrusive narration", and "by recording the actual flow of thought with its paradoxes and irrelevancies they sought to avoid the over-insistent authorial rhetoric of Edwardian novels" (Childs and Fowler, 2006:224). In a sense, the real is offered as "refracted and reflected in the novel's representative consciousness. 'Look within,' Woolf urged the novelist. Reality and truth had gone inward" (Greenblatt and Abrams, 2006:1839). This is what the realist writers did not do because "they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body" (Woolf, 2000:740) as Woolf puts forward. It is well known that Woolf's theory of fiction was formulated in her essays. In her oft-cited essay, "Modern Fiction" she defines the new novel as a type free from the old conventions; the subject matter of the novel and the task of the novelist are defined as well. Woolf (2000:741) recorded:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this". Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

So the new concern of the novel would be toward more inward; henceforth, the reality would be relative, momentary, and fragmented; the art of the novelist would be expressive and impressionistic. The new literary device to access the character would be the stream-of-consciousness technique. Entering into the inner worlds of the characters, the novelist would reveal their interior flows of thoughts and thus the reader would hear the characters speaking from within. In *Mrs. Dalloway's* structure, it is observed that through the stream of

consciousness technique the reader can gain access to each character's mind, moreover to access their realities that change not only from one person to another but also from time to time and even moment to moment even when the same character is in question. Especially the reflection of the minds of the main characters, Mrs. Dalloway and her double Septimus Warren Smith, and of the minds of the other characters participating in the main characters' stories – Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, Elizabeth Dalloway, Lady (Millicent) Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, Miss (Doris) Kilman and Lucrezia Warren Smith – take a great bulk in the novel and render the subjective and transient realities. Yet the minds of the background characters such as Scrope Purvis, Lucy, Mrs. Dempster and Ellie Henderson are reflected momentarily to depict their own realities. To exemplify the changing realities a number of scenes may be found in the novel. For instance, though it seemed to Clarissa that it was the right decision for her to marry Richard and despite her doubts about Peter, she feels that if she had married Peter, her life might have been glamorous. Though she sometimes feels happy because she has found security, stability and privacy because Richard respects her “privacy of soul” in their marriage, she longs to escape from restriction of her own life while begging Peter silently in her inner world: “Take me with you” (Woolf, 1987:43). On the one hand Clarissa seems to be finding the meaning of life through giving parties; on the other hand, she reflects upon her having wasted her life on trivialities. We also know that Peter was once a socialist (46) but as it can be inferred from his immediate position, he must be an ardent member of the imperial power. He feels respect to the young marching soldiers seeing in their faces the praise of “duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (47). He identifies himself with them recollecting his own youth. This gives us the idea that once he shaped his reality relying on the socialist values (though he was a failure), but now he has lost all of them. Septimus's realities have also changed. The reader is told that he was “one of the first to volunteer” for the army (77). Once with patriotic feelings he joined the army and fought in the battle to save England against France, but now, despite his insanity, he has become mature enough to see war as the most tyrannical act of human. He sees the system as predatory because the war proved devastating especially for him. Likewise, Lucrezia and her realities have changed. About five years ago she married Septimus at the expense of leaving her hometown, Italy; she is regretful now because she feels trapped in a foreign country being unable to help her psychologically ill husband; she feels lonely (23). As can be seen, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf implies the idea that reality is constructed from people's particular experiences and subjective perceptions. This type of depiction of reality relates to the reality concept in New Historicism, which proposes the idea that reality is not something unchangeable; it is something constructed; it changes due to the time as well as the particular historical and cultural conditions. Due to the subjective perception of the authors and historians, we have various types of realities in literary and historical texts; due to the perception of literary critics and historians we have various types of realities in the interpretations of literary works and history. The perception of reality concept

in both Woolf's modernist art and New Historicism seems to have challenged the concept of reality in the previous literary eras. It is because of this new type of perception that Woolf makes Clarissa avoid judging people: "She would not say any one in the world now that they were this or were that" (99) and "She would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (10). Woolf also creates diversity between the character's perceptions of the same things. For example, when Maisie Johnson sees the Smiths in the park, she thinks that they are quarreling (25), whereas Septimus has the disability to understand life owing to his shell-shock and Lucrezia is unable to help Septimus. The novel presents modernity from different perspectives. On one side we see the passers-by's adoration of the royalty when a royal car is passing down the street (18-19) and Peter Walsh's consideration of the ambulance as "one of the triumphs of civilization" (134) on the other side, we see the subversion of modernity with Peter Walsh's fluctuating feelings about civilization, his dislike of "empire" and "army" (50) and with the insanity of Septimus, which is caused by the World War I and, as implied in the novel, by modernity. Related with the concept of changing reality, it can be asserted that Woolf as a modernist not only dealt with what constituted reality but also, as Heims (2005:70) points out, brought "a new vision of *how* reality was constituted, perceived, and represented, and an altered attitude toward reality". This is also a new historicist approach to reality. New historicists deal with the process of the constitution of the reality as well as the concept of reality that is not static. It is because of this quality of the novel – its dealing with the process of the construction of reality – that while Clarissa, in a post-war safety, thanks Heaven that the war is over, for Lady Bexborough, and "for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed" (6), "its hurt is undiminished" (Bradshaw, 2000:xii). Mr. Bowley thinks of war and its remaining "orphans, widows" and has tears in his eyes (19). Apart from these, the stream of consciousness technique is observed to be a device that enabled Woolf to reflect one character's impressions of the other characters; so affluent with such impressions, the new novel would have an impressionistic dimension. Woolf's impressionism in *Mrs. Dalloway* is felt time and again through diverse impressions about the same event, character or phenomenon gained by her characters. This is indeed related with the polyphonic structure of the novel and multiple points of view at times contrasting with each other and at times intersecting. These modernist aspects of the novel resulting from each other provide the novel with a new historicist dimension. As a modern literary discipline, New Historicism approves of the multiple points of view. New historicist critics like to pursue other viewpoints, outlooks on especially the things that have become familiar, orthodox and long-established. New Historicism's rejection of the monolithic worldview as reality is very similar to that of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a modernist novel. The issue of polyphony will be returned to briefly in a later part of the study.

Another thing that is common to both Woolf's modernism and New Historicism is the rejection of the essentialist humanism. To elaborate on this idea we can give American cultural

anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1973) idea revealed in his collection of essays, *The Interpretation of Cultures* that "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture [...] without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men" (49). Geertz's recognition of individuals as "cultural products – products manufactured" constitutes one of the primary assumptions of New Historicism. Geertz (1973:50) does not deny the existence of the innate qualities in human beings; he distinguishes between what is intrinsic and what is cultural:

Some things are, for all intents and purposes, entirely controlled intrinsically: we need no more cultural guidance to learn how to breathe than a fish needs to learn how to swim. Others are almost certainly largely cultural [...] Almost all complex human behavior is, of course, the interactive, nonadditive outcome of the two. Our capacity to speak is surely innate; our capacity to speak English is surely cultural.

There is a close alliance between the new historicists' consideration of the individual as a cultural product, which stemmed from Geertz's analysis of culture, and Woolf's creation of her characters as the products of certain cultural moments. Neema Parvini (2002) rightly argues that the diverse thinkers in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism are united by their commitment to anti-humanism, which can be roughly defined as the rejection of essentialist humanism, which is the belief that there is such a thing as a universal, unchanging human nature and that human beings have innate traits and characteristics which are common to all humanity. What distinguishes Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher, Alan Sinfield, Jonathan Dallimore, Catherine Belsey and other leading new historicists and cultural materialists from all previous generations of critics" is the notion that "[t]here is no such a thing as universal human nature" (Parvini, 2002:48). Geertz's method of "thick description", an important practice in New Historicism, pays attention to detail and difference in the study of cultural forms rather than the generalizations. Geertz (1993:53-54) insists that

We must [...] descend into detail, past the misleading tags, past the metaphysical types, past the empty similarities to grasp firmly the essential character of not only the various cultures but [also] the various sorts of individuals within each culture, if we wish to encounter humanity face to face. In this area, the road to the general, to the revelatory simplicities of science, lies through a concern with the particular, the circumstantial, [and] the concrete.

The new historicist conviction that "human beings have no essential nature and all behavior is conditioned in the individual by his or her social environment" (Parvini, 2002:48) may be easily attached to Woolf's formation of her characters. According to Woolf, the true reality resides not in the universal but in the particular. For this reason, she creates particular characters having

particular qualities and experiences. Yet, through the particular, the reader can reach the implications of the culture, history and society of London's modern times. By doing so, Woolf does not give us the idea that her characters and their experiences are timeless and that every reader can therefore have identifications with her characters. On the contrary, she gives us the notion that each character in her novel is embedded with the society, culture and history in which they have existed. They are not the representatives of the universal objective ideas; they are actually social, cultural and historical beings, i.e. constructions. In other words, her characters actually do not exhibit any universal trait that makes them represent all human beings; rather they are depicted as individuals having their own characteristics, which makes them particularized and historicized as well. This quality of Woolf's characters may be combined with her modernism, which, then, may be combined with one of the new historicist attitudes. Characters in a literary work just like people in real life are the cultural manifestations of their own time.

When looked through the new historicist lens, *Mrs. Dalloway* is observed to be a text exemplary of the representation of the formation of identity. Woolf sees the novelist as a slave to life and as someone who should always be in close contact with life because everything in life can be the subject matter of his/her work. This leads us to the idea that his or her characters can be characterized with their social dimensions because Woolf drew them exploiting the social facts and phenomena. This sounds enough to strike a chord with a new historicist idea that identities are fashioned by the society, social and cultural values; therefore they are social constructs. In her essay "Joseph Conrad" in *The Common Reader*, Woolf wrote that "if as novelist you wish to test man in all his relationships, the proper antagonist is man; his ordeal is in society, not solitude" (Woolf, 1925:130). Woolf seems to have formed her characters surrounded by clearly and densely constituted social lives. Julia Briggs (2010:70) in one her studies, provides a general definition of Woolf's fiction with regard to the main interests in her novels:

Virginia Woolf's fiction explores the nature of the human condition: what makes up our consciousness when we are alone and when we are with others, how we live in time, and to what extent our natures are determined by the accidents of gender, class and historical moment. In her novels, the Great War (as it was always referred to, until the Second World War) was the defining moment, the line that separated the past from the present, always seen as an abyss or a watershed.

Alex Zwerdling (1977:69) focusing on *Mrs. Dalloway*'s engagement with the social issues, points out that Woolf deals with in it "how the individual is shaped (or deformed) by his social environment, [...] how historical forces impinge on his life and shift its course", and "how class, wealth, and sex help to determine his fate". Written between the years 1923 and 1924 and set in

London and on an imaginary day in June 1923, *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays the middle-class English society after World War I. “The novel, therefore, tackles a complexity of issues ranging from the social changes of post-war England to a questioning of the polarization of the sexes in British society, to an intimate exploration of the interconnectedness of individual lives” (Miller, 2006:153-154). The novel captures “the extraordinarily delicate and shifting nature of individual consciousness”; it also “guides the reader through the course of one June day in 1923 in the life of Clarissa Dalloway and her “double,” Septimus Warren Smith” (Miller, 2006:154). The individual consciousnesses are observed to be sketching out the past.

One of the important assumptions of New Historicism is the inclusion of the social, historical and cultural paradigms in literature. As John Brannigan (1998:3) points out “where many previous critical approaches to literary texts assumed that texts had some universal significance and essential ahistorical truth to impart, new historicist and cultural materialist critics tend to read literary texts as material products of specific historical conditions”. It is because of this reason that new historicists emphasize contextuality, the close relation between text and context. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a text embedded with the social, cultural and historical phenomena ranging from war, social life, and medicine to eugenics, lesbianism, and patriarchy. So it is a novel all of whose characters are constituted by the social, historical and cultural matrices in the same way as Woolf as an artist was shaped by the society, history and culture and as *Mrs. Dalloway* as a modernist novel challenging the once-prevailing 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century notions of novel writing was shaped by the same elements as it was suggested previously in the study. The characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* are defined by their social worlds. The main character, Clarissa Dalloway may be referred to as the first instance to the socially and culturally constructed characters. Being a woman over fifty and an upper-class politician’s wife Mrs. Dalloway is constituted by the Victorian values and the patriarchy. Clarissa constructs an identity as Mrs. Dalloway in connection with her having married a Member of Parliament and being “the perfect hostess” (9). She is, in effect, in an identity crisis though she pretends she is not. It is because of this reason that she does not feel herself as Clarissa anymore. She thinks:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway (11).

Adopting the role given to her by the patriarchal society, Clarissa “sees herself as fused into her husband’s identity with nothing separate or distinctly her own” (Taylor, 1991:369). Clarissa “knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed” (9- 10). As a cultural being, she feels herself a part of London, of whatever she sees in London’s

streets, a “part of people she had never met”. She feels that she survived “in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of the things, here, there, [...] she being part [...] of the trees at home, of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was” (10). She is depicted as a woman who confuses Armenians with Turks (109). Clarissa seems to have been constructed through a discursive process, as well. She behaves in the way she is imposed on and she constitutes an identity in herself – an identity as the patriarchal imperial society expects from her to have. Even if she disliked to be called “a perfect hostess” by Peter Walsh as he mocked at Clarissa with this expression, she has strived to be a supreme hostess after her marriage to Richard Dalloway. She adopts this role so much that her only job has become to give parties and she has become to be associated with her parties. The reason for this is Clarissa’s having no identity other than the imposed one on her as a woman. In this respect, Clarissa may be seen as a social victim. No matter how Clarissa feels no repentance for her marriage with Mr. Dalloway and feels freedom in her marriage, she lives in the longing of her youth and with the awareness of its impossibility. Peter Walsh sees in Clarissa “the death of the soul” (53). He sensed years ago, when he understood that Clarissa would marry Richard Dalloway, that the death of Clarissa’s soul would be at the hands of “British or upper class propriety” (Miller, 2006:158).

On the other hand, Peter Walsh, Clarissa’s old suitor seems to have been constructed by the imperial culture. He is revealed as a representative of the colonial Empire, with his colonial visits and deeds in India. The reader learns as Clarissa learns from Peter himself that he has come back from India to get a divorce with his wife living in London so that he could marry Daisy, an Indian woman he loves. He is also conceived as an aggregation of his personal experiences. For example, his bitter disappointment caused by Clarissa’s refusal of his marriage proposal and her preference for marriage with the conservative Richard years ago seems to have comprised his colonizing attitude to women, which is “dramatized through his ‘piratical’ pursuit of an anonymous woman in central London” (Amigoni, 2000:122), (Woolf, 1997:48-49). Septimus Warren Smith is a cultural and historical being exposed to the bitter realities of the modern world such as war and death. He suffers from shell-shock about five years after the war, as he witnessed one of his friends Evans’s shot and succeeding death during the war. He is actually a victim of ‘trench warfare’. In the novel he becomes one major voice along with that of Clarissa and his voice dramatizes “recent history: namely the war, assumptions about ‘appropriate’ masculine responses to it, and the medical treatment of trauma” (Amigoni, 2000:122). The idea evoked with Septimus’s mental illness is that even though the war ended, its impacts on the individual have lasted. Septimus’s reaction to the war is different from those of the other inhabitants of London; and this gives us the idea that a historical time or event is not necessarily to be perceived in the same way by everybody. Woolf’s creating such a character as Septimus seems to be a new historicist tendency to delineate the diversity between the perceptions of history. Septimus is a means showing the reader that there may be some ignored stories in

history. The new historicist critic has an affinity with stories unnoticed, ignored, and out of the mainstream of history. It should also be noted that Septimus's perception of nation was formed through discourse; his idea of England "consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays"; England for him is "Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilization* and Bernard Shaw" (77). *Mrs. Dalloway's* exploring, "among other things, the social and psychological impact of the War" (Bradshaw, 2000:xi) may be taken as proof that in the construction of her characters Woolf considered the historical and social contexts significant. Even the minor characters sustain the impacts of society, culture and history, in which they have been and are. To illustrate the point, we might take Lady Bexborough and Lucrezia as examples. In the formation of Lady Bexborough, the importance of the context is obvious. She has been drawn as a mother on whom the impact of the war is seen dramatically. "Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar [...] with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed (6). The impact of the past on the individual and the individual's perception of the events in history can be linked to the new historicist approach to history. John Mepham (1991:94) summarizes the relevance between the society and characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* thus:

The social system works intensely in the novel in any number of ways, most dramatically through the power that doctors exercise over Septimus, driving him to his death, but also in that every one of the characters struggles to maintain an identity while being subject to a complex field of social and cultural forces, which hold them in place in society. As Virginia Woolf invented more characters, Peter Walsh (Clarissa's ex-lover), Elizabeth (her daughter), Elizabeth's unappealing friend Miss Kilman, the arrogant doctor Sir William Bradshaw, and so on, the portrayal of a society which works powerfully on people, squeezing them into the required shapes, training their emotions, punishing their misdemeanours, and eliminating the failures, those who cannot conform to the required conventions of selfhood, becomes more and more complex and intense.

Lucrezia's constitution by her Italian upbringing seems to be proving a new historicist outlook – to use Bertens's words – "inevitably, we too live within discourses that we have at least partly been shaped by" (Bertens, 2001:182). As Lucrezia's perception of man has been formed by the patriarchal discourses about man, she thinks that it does not fit a man to say that he will kill himself. She is ashamed of her husband's cowardice and "she could tell nobody"; she would rather to think that Septimus "had fought; he was brave" and "there was nothing the matter" it is just because "Septimus was selfish. So men are" (22).

In summary, Woolf reflects her characters providing them with cultural and social consciousnesses and with formed identities. Therefore, *Mrs. Dalloway* can be regarded as a

novel proving a new historicist notion that individuals are formed and thus they move through various roles and identities socially and culturally constructed.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* the characters' being products of manifold determinants which are specific to a class, social group or ideology is an aspect of the novel which shows that it has traces from Bakhtin's dialogic criticism, which was utilized by new historicist critics. "Dialogic Criticism" inaugurated by Bakhtin contributed to New Historicism with regard to its recognition of literary texts as discourses conducted by human characters whose voices engage in a dynamic interchange of beliefs, attitudes, sentiments, and other expressions of states of consciousness" (Zengin, 2007:20). Bakhtin (1984, 1994) argues that texts are divided into two as monoglossic (univocal/single-voiced) and heteroglossic (polyphonic/multi-voiced). He sees the polyphonic novel as a site of the dialogic interaction of multiple voices, each of which represents a way of thought specific to a class, ideological formation or speech community. *Mrs. Dalloway* provides us with a series of social classes, ideological systems, which are communicated through different characters each of whom are the products of the society and culture in which they have been formed. This fits nicely with theories on the dialogic nature of the novel produced by Bakhtin, who describes the polyphonic novel as fiction with no single, authorial or monoglossic voice but with multiple language styles and registers from various social groups or cultures and representing their modes of thinking and speaking ways. *Mrs. Dalloway* with its polyphonic structure complies with Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and New Historicist theories. Though New Historicists do not mean that all texts are heteroglot and they accept that some of them may be monologic due to the worldview or mindset they reflect and impose or they are imposed on, they defend the idea of polyphony/multivocality in the literary, historical, social or cultural criticisms of the texts and events. According to them, not only some texts are heteroglot but also critiques are because they are formed by the expressions of characters, authors and critics who are themselves the fabrications of any particular cultural and historical moments in time. Woolf, with a new historicist consciousness, created *Mrs. Dalloway* so as to make it a polyphonic one involving different voices.

There are significant parallels between new historicists' practices and methods in approaching history and that of Woolf. New Historicism's consideration of history not as a universal but a textual and contextual phenomenon seems to be identical with Woolf's regarding history as particular pieces bound to the context and recollections having ruptures. Problematizing the truthfulness and objectivity of historical discourse, New Historicism brought a new outlook to the analysis of all works of history. According to the new historicists historical discourses cannot directly reflect the past events and realities about them on two grounds: Firstly, it is not possible to go back to those times to observe the past events, that is, we have no direct access to the past, and secondly, the historical narratives are always bound to the subjectivity of the historian.

New Historicism's challenge to history's claim to be realistic, objective and inherently truthful and its acceptance of historical works as narratives owe much to Hayden White's (1973:48-49) claim that there is no distinction between history and philosophy or between history and literature – a distinction on which earlier thinkers [...] had based their "historiographical enterprises" and which was against the "fictionalization of history". White (1973:ix) sees historical work as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse". Histories "contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic", and a historian "performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring [...] to explain 'what was really happening' in it" (White, 1973:ix-x). Alun Munslow (2006:149) argues that White's analysis of how historians describe and evaluate the past events is probably "the most radical development in historical methodology in the last thirty years". White's arguments about the nature of history, which correspond with New Historicism, may be explained in Munslow's (2006: 149-150) expressions:

For White, because the past is invented or imagined rather than found, history the first time around does not conform or correspond to a preexisting narrative or story. White does not dispute that the past existed, and he is not anti-referentialist, but his answer to the question I posed at the outset, asking whether the past pre-exists as a story told by people in the past to explain their lives to themselves, is to argue that we impose stories on the past for a variety of reasons which are explanatory, ideological and political. Narratives are not detached vehicles for transmitting past realities, nor less can historians discover *the* true narrative of the past in the evidence of human intentions and beliefs [...] because [history] is a narrative-making exercise, there is far more to history than empiricism and inference. Reconstructionists are particularly upset with White's argument that history cannot correspond to a given or pre-existing story of the past, much less one that is knowable for what it really means. For White, there is no meaning in the past. The historian provides this. What is significant in this is the historian's own existence.

White, according to H el ene Bowen Raddeker (2007:24), was inspired by Barthes, who "contested history's facticity" seeing it as "fictive in the sense of its being primarily the product of the writer's imagination: the historian's creation". Barthes in his "Discourse of History" argues that "the historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series" (as cited in Raddeker, 2007:24). Linda Hutcheon (1989:89) takes attention to the textuality of history in the following extract taken from her *Poetics of Postmodernism*:

both history and fiction are discourses [...] both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past (“exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination”). In other words, the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past “events” into present historical “facts.” This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth” but an acknowledgement of the meaningmaking function of human constructs.

As a modernist novel, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, characters’ perception of history individually is actually a challenge to old historicism’s claim about being concrete and objective. Ann Bannfield (2007:50) points out the relation between history and the modernist novel thus: “the modernist novel does not omit history; it shows its new face. History’s ruptures, however distanced in time and space, continue to have their repercussions”. “History’s invasion of private life” (Bannfield, 2007:49) leaves its traces in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As an instance the following scene, where an elderly woman “with hands raised, with white apron blowing” can be given. She “seems (so powerful is this infirmity) to seek, over a desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world” (53). Almost all the characters are the casualties of the past in the novel.

What Woolf does with regard to history/past in *Mrs. Dalloway* is to let her characters have different histories; thus she presents the reader with alternative histories. By letting her characters think about their pasts, she lets the readers see the impressions of the past on the characters. In other words, Woolf seems to have created her characters giving them such a consciousness providing them with a past and making them remember or think and narrate their own pasts through their subjectivity. It is apparent that their perception and recollection of the past give hints about the novel’s approach to history. Past is not given as something linear; there is no chronology in the reflection of the past; there are recollections, flashbacks, and ruptures. Woolf’s interest is in not only giving what happened in the past but also depicting how the past happenings have been and are perceived by the individual. Woolf characterizes crucial moments from the past as constitutive of the personalities of the novel’s characters. History as depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a collection of subjective narratives. All these give one the idea that Woolf, like a new historicist critic, took the past, if not their pasts are great histories, as perceived and represented by the individual. This is certainly a new historicist approach and perhaps the most foregrounded quality of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel’s reflections of the flowing thoughts and ideas of the conscious and subconscious minds of the characters via the stream of consciousness technique seems to serve this time a new historicist assumption that history is not linear, it is not just composed of the chronological events rather it is something narrated and fictionalized by the historian who is himself trapped in his historicity. Each of Woolf’s characters can be seen as the cultural and historical constructions of the time in which they live. What constitutes their realities is that of their interpretations of the happenings in the past. Additionally, they all

remember past to give a meaning to their present moments. This quality is attributed to history by new historicists, history has such a function as a helper to understand and shape the present. New historicists deal with the past not just because of their desire to reveal the past events but because past is relevant with the present situation. It seems that history has the same function for both New Historicism and Woolf.

Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993:4) characterize New Historicism with its “lack of faith in ‘objectivity’ and ‘permanence’ and its stress not upon the direct recreation of the past, but rather the process by which the past is constructed or invented”. By this we understand that for new historicists, history is subjective and particular and it cannot be accessed directly. We know history through discourses, which have actually a narrative quality and are subjective because they are themselves written documents produced by people, i.e. historians and exposed to the subjectivity of the historian. In *Mrs. Dalloway* we see the presentations of the particular past narratives of the characters subjectively. The novel seems to have been constituted by the particular stories of these personalities whom the great history does not see worth reflecting as they are not great historical personalities. Having these qualities the novel seems to be at odds with the claim of history’s superiority over literature. The novel sees history as not something composed of the great stories of the great figures in history rather, it sees history as lived experiences of the common inhabitants of London; it delineates the historical facts as lived by, for example, repressing or repressed, silent, forgotten or marginalized people. To put it differently, the history reflected in the novel does not come out of the experiences of the great figures but of usual daily experiences of the common people. Yet these particular histories may be related to the larger histories. Being a narrative of lives, Woolf’s novel reveals facts not recorded in the official historical documents. Therefore it would not be wrong to say that *Mrs. Dalloway* offers alternative histories and, as such, it performs almost the same function as historical writings claiming to be factual, and that even the novel is superior to them because it tells the untold stories – stories not involved in history books, and, as such, it rewrites history. In the novel, the personal experiences come to the reader not through a direct reflection but through a series of reminiscences, impressions and sensations either in the moments of exultation or unhappiness or of any accompanying feeling. In this case, *Mrs. Dalloway* contains more elements of truth than history, which has been claimed to be factual. As Dibattista (2009:365) points out, “in the course of writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf exulted in an important novelistic discovery with her modern understanding of time, memory, and the creative consciousness”. It is because of this reason that Woolf created her characters with certain pasts. She explains this process in her *Diary*: “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment” (Letter Thursday, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923). Woolf gives in *Mrs. Dalloway* a number of fragments of history, each of which happened at different times, recalled

by the characters whenever they are evoked, and which are expected to make up a total at the end. The author defines this way of reflecting the past as “her prime discovery so far” and names this discovery her “tunneling process by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it” (Letter Monday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1923). In this sense, Woolf makes her characters reconstruct/restructure their past in their minds through retrospection. In this case, everybody has his/her own historicity, and their past, though fragmented, is retold as they perceive them. Although Woolf’s way of reflecting the past and history is not quite the same with that of the new historicists, some similarities between them may still be constructed with regard to their nature of being narrative. Perhaps the only difference is that the characters’ narrated past are not included in a historical discourse but in a fictional work. Nevertheless, it is not so important because New Historicism has already removed the distinction between literature and history. The narrated pasts in Woolf’s characters’ minds may be taken as discourses restructured by them; and this is similar to the historian’s act of creation of the narrative discourses about history. Thus each character reshapes his/her own past according to his/her own conception. This is very similar to the new historicists’ approach to history, the act of creation of historical discourses, the narrative quality of history and the historicity of the historian. Woolf’s characters approach history, even if it is not a great history, in a subjective way, i.e. as they perceive it. They narrate the past events as a result of a selection, which is inevitable. The case is not different for a historian according to the new historicists. Woolf’s characters evaluate the past from their present historical situations. This is what new historicists say about the historian: a historian is trapped in his own historicity. The case being so, one cannot reach a full, coherent and linear past at the end of the reading process of *Mrs. Dalloway*; rather the reader is given a restructured fragmented various forms of the past. In other words, Woolf unearths the past by instalments instead of giving past “as monumentally complete social and emotional universe”. In the novel, “the past is broken up even as it is returned and restored to the present” (Dibattista, 2009:365). Thus, there is no single past as well as no single reality. The novel sees history as not something composed of the great stories of the great figures in history rather as lived experiences of the common inhabitants of London. In other words, the history reflected in the novel does not come out of the experiences of the great figures but of usual daily experiences of the common people. The novel delineates the historical facts as lived by, for example, silent, repressed, forgotten or marginalized people. *Mrs. Dalloway*, in this context, embraces a relationship with New Historicism. History, for both, is not unitary, continuous and coherent. This aspect of the novel paves the way for both the plurality of and indeterminacy in meaning, which are themselves traits of both modernist and post-modernist novels, and a strong assumption of New Historicism about texts.

Woolf’s dealing with the marginalized and the subjugated may be taken as proof of the inclusion of one of the new historicist implications in the novel. Like a new historicist Woolf accepts the

idea that in a society or culture there are marginal groups as well as the central ones. According to the new historicist conception, it may also be interesting to depict the experiences of the peripheral as well as those of the central and/or powerful ones. The idea that a society is made up of many different groups and in the analysis of culture or cultural, historical and literary texts, the marginalized must also be considered to be significant is an important assumption in New Historicism. One of the aims of new historicist analysis is to uncover the hidden pasts, realities hidden among great stories of past and thus to rewrite new histories. Brannigan (1998:35) characterizes new historicist analysis with its interest in the peripheral. New Historicism shifted “attention away from the major battles, lines of monarchical succession and honoured heroes and leaders” by “focusing on the histories of marriage, religious belief, rural labourers, child labourers, entertainment rituals and customs, motherhood, gambling or the slave trade”. So social and cultural historians “reconstructed the everyday lives of vast sections of population whose stories had been neglected in traditional history” (Brannigan, 1998:35). Literary studies much focus on the analysis of the marginalization of subjects identified as, for example, witches, the insane, heretics, prisoners and homosexuals. Woolf’s frequently quoted expression upon the subject matter of fiction may be taken in connection with her dealing with the peripheral. She wrote: “ ‘The proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss” (Woolf, 2002:87).

Woolf presents a new historicist consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway* by portraying marginalized people or groups through the employment of some of her characters. In the character of Mrs. Dalloway Woolf gives her readers the figure of the woman repressed by the patriarchal society. In the character of Miss Kilman she reflects lesbianism. The former relation between Clarissa and Sally Seton may also be taken as sign of Woolf’s affinity with the marginalized groups with regard to lesbianism. Kilman also represents a minority – the ally of Russian and Austrians. Another example to the marginalized groups is the native woman. The reader knows that Peter Walsh mentions Clarissa that he loves an Indian woman. At this Clarissa thinks: “She flattered him; she fooled, him” (42). Her thoughts imply that the native woman is thought to have a potential to cheat the white man, which puts the native woman on the periphery. In the character of Septimus, Woolf reflects the insane. Via the inclusion, in the novel, of all these characters representing the groups they belong to, Woolf reflects her interest in the society’s understanding, perception and the ways of responding them. One can also detect what the place of womanhood, lesbianism and madness in the society of the post-war period. The novel demonstrates not only how people think about or response them but also how people’s notions of them have been formed by means of the classifications, criteria, norms and oppositions, all of which are legitimized in one way or the other in the society. *Mrs Dalloway* is also a good example to show how the oppressed and subjugated are made the other after the process of discursive formation –

a process that naturalizes the othering. New Historicist critics have also dealt with the process of the discursive formation of the ideas and norms which seem to be fixed and unalterable. *Mrs. Dalloway* has a potential to represent the marginalized. In a new historicist reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, for example, the insane may be taken as an instance to the marginalized groups and how madness is perceived by the public and how people respond it as well as how it is constituted and treated in the post-war society may be dealt with. The social practices that come into play with regard to madness may also be discussed in respect of power relations. The medical authority represented by Dr. William Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes may be analyzed in correspondence with insanity represented by Septimus. This is one of the common practices exploited by the new historicist analyst. Through such a reading *Mrs. Dalloway's* place in the discourse of madness may be detected. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a text in which the negotiation of the social system is maintained. The medical authority is subverted through Septimus's committing suicide. Woolf's method of dealing with such social issues makes her novel a new historicist one. It should be recalled here that New Historicism sees texts as sites of either opposing the authority or taking its sides. When it comes to the discourse of madness, *Mrs. Dalloway* can be considered to be a text subverting it because Septimus's suicide is a way of denouncing the medical authority by showing its uselessness. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a text not only attesting the power relations but having a potential to denounce power, and rather to subvert power. In Brannigan's (1998:6) definition of New Historicism a significant aspect of the theory is revealed: New historicism is a "mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds. As a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible". There is a close parallel between this aspect of texts put forward by New Historicism and *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which power relations can be observed. In this way the novel verifies the new historicist tenet that literary works are the sites in which how powers operate can be seen.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The preliminary purpose of this study is to make connections between the art of Virginia Woolf as a modernist novelist and some assumptions and practices of New Historicism. To this end, the study has attempted to put forth the striking resemblances between Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* and new historicist theories and practices. The findings may be summed up as in the following: The primary concern of New Historicism is to prefigure the interaction between texts and the historical and cultural systems; and this seems to be proven through *Mrs. Dalloway* when it is put in its cultural, literary and historical contexts. A literary text, for new historicists, is not a unique product of a single mind; rather it is a cultural artifact of specific cultural conditions. This study has argued that written in modern ages, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a production of the time in which it was written and it also paved the way for the modernist novel, rejecting the prevailing modes

of novel writing. One of the striking analogies between New Historicism and *Mrs. Dalloway* is their recognition of the concept of reality as momentary, fragmented and subjective. For both New Historicism and Woolf there is no universal unchanging objective reality; and this study has argued that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a good instance to present this new outlook on reality. To elaborate on this idea, the study has attempted to present the reality concept involved in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the novel's characters. Another parallel between Woolf's modernism and New Historicism constructed in this study is in regard with their approach to man. New Historicism argues that there is no essential human nature. The novel has such a potential with its modernist outlook to challenge the essential humanism. Like a new historicist analyst, Woolf recognizes man as a socio-cultural and historical being. Instead of the delineation of characters as universal beings, she reflects them as historical and cultural formations, i.e. the specific patterns produced by particular historical and cultural conditions. This quality of the novel may be associated with its heteroglot nature, a quality through which New Historicism characterizes texts. For new historicists, texts are not univocal productions; rather they are polyphonic since they include various voices of people that are themselves the formations of specific social, cultural and historical moments in time. Another analogy between New Historicism and Woolf's modernist art has been found in respect of their approach to history. New Historicism brought a new perception of history; it sees history not as a universal objective account of the past events that are about the great historical figures but as subjective accounts of common people. *Mrs. Dalloway*, through the personalities of its characters, touches on the particular stories of these personalities whom the great history does not see worth reflecting as they are not great historical figures. Both new historicists and Woolf deal with the particular histories. In *Mrs. Dalloway* history is seen as a cultural and subjective interpretation. For both New Historicism and Woolf our understanding of history is conducted by our status quo and consciousness. Both new historicist critics by means of their analyses of history and Woolf by means of her novel emphasize the narrative nature of history. Apart from these implications of New Historicism in *Mrs. Dalloway*, another link between the new historicist theory and Woolf's modernist art has been maintained by the presentation of their affinity with the marginalized. Women, lesbians and the insane are the minorities that Woolf handled in her novel to present the social, cultural and historical facts and to denounce the oppressor. The study ends with the argument that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel in which power relations are seen, and in this way, which verifies the new historicist assumption that literary works are the sites in which power operations can be observed.

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