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A Study on Clarissa's Construction of Female Space in *Mrs. Dalloway*

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ABSTRACT: Known as the pioneer of modernism and feminism in the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), whose masterpiece Mrs. Dalloway (1925) adopts a dual narrative structure to describe the social life of Clarissa and the psychological collapse of veteran Septimus in parallel, and intersperse the memory fragments of the characters through the flow of consciousness. Based on Doreen Massey's space-time theoretical framework, this study deeply analyzes how the protagonist Clarissa Dalloway actively constructs her female identity and subjectivity through specific space practice in the specific social space of London after the war in the early 20th century. The research abandons the single gender perspective and takes the perspective of the interweaving of space, time and social power relations as the core analysis path. This paper first explains the core ideas of Massey and combines them with the concept of "psychological time" in Woolf's modernist narrative to lay a theoretical foundation, and then systematically analyzes Clarissa's construction of feminist space and the construction of identity, both of which use space and time. The study demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway not only vividly records the complex experience of modern women in the historical transition period, but also profoundly reveals how individuals open up their own dynamic space in the established social norms through daily space and time practice. This literary representation provides a profound reference for modern people to seek the integration of self and society.

KEYWORDS: Virginia Woolf; female space; time; Clarissa; *Mrs Dalloway*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) stands as a central figure in 20th-century British modernist literature and a pioneer of stream-of-consciousness fiction. Born in 1882 of a literary family in Kensington, London, she grew up immersed in the cultural environment of Victorian intellectual elites. Woolf's works are renowned for their experimental narrative techniques, including stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and non-linear temporal structures. These techniques enable her to delve deeply into complex themes such as female consciousness, gender politics, the nature of time, and middle-class domestic ethics.

The novel *Mrs. Dalloway* does not adopt a traditional chapter division. Instead, the entire narrative follows a continuous and flowing way. The narrative of the story is presented through a third-person limited point of view, focusing on the two central streams of consciousness: Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith. Through Clarissa's day of preparing for a party, the novel deeply explores the meaning of human existence, interspersing with her memories and inner thoughts.

As the main character of the novel, Clarissa takes on core and main responsibility in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The entire narrative revolves around her day of preparing for the party. Her inner thoughts guide readers into her inner worlds of other characters. At the same time, outwardly, she organizes the party with order and perfect way. However, this is just a cover to mask her inner emptiness and fear. She is both a trapped female confined by the identity of Mrs. Dalloway and someone who desperately uses social engagements to maintain the last norm of the old era. This exposes the difficult position faced by women at the time, who were forced to conceal their true selves.

This study uses a combination of close reading, theoretical critique, and spatial criticism. Using British geographer Doreen Massey's relational space theory, gendered spatio-temporal perspectives, and the concept of psychological time as the primary analytical framework. It interprets *Mrs. Dalloway* within the specific historical and geographical context of post-war London. The core question is how Clarissa Dalloway actively constructs her female identity through everyday spaces and time practices. What's more, it explores how she negotiates self-identity within the relationships between memory and the present, public and private, and object and subject.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a representative work of British modernist literature, the research on *Mrs. Dalloway* abroad has experienced a great shift from singularity to diversity. This shift is closely related to the thriving development of literary theory trends in the late 20th century. As Barry pointed out in "An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory". The rise of theoretical perspectives such as feminist

criticism and cultural studies has moved literary analysis beyond the text instead on focusing on issues like "how literature constructs gender identity" (Barry, 1995, p. 89). Then the research routes mainly revolve in three main ways including space, time and interdisciplinary trends. It presents a rich and profound research landscape.

In the field of spatial theory, Doreen Massey's "Power Geometry" and other concepts presented in "Space, Place and Gender" provide core theoretical support for understanding the mutual construction of space and gender. She argues that "space is not a static, passive container, but a dynamic product shaped by social relations, including power structures such as gender and class" (Massey, 2019, p. 374). This theory gives us a solid basis for reading urban experiences in novels, and at the same time, it clears a new path for analyzing how gender and power interact through space.

Subsequent research has expanded in multiple specific directions. For instance, Rudenko and Komutstsi (2021) explored and constructed the "gendered body" from a narratological perspective. They argued that "the presentation of the body in space is not merely descriptive but a performative act of gender construction" (p. 119). They pointed out that it was precisely through the unique narrative technique that Woolf made the appearance of the female body in space a way to challenge traditional gender concepts. Additionally, Simona Sacchi (2025) et al explored from a psychological perspective the relationship between urban environments and people's judgments of gender, further expanding the scope of the research field of space and gender .

In the field of time philosophy, Watanabe's early research was groundbreaking. He clearly pointed out that in the novel, there is a dominant tension between two kinds of time: one is represented by Big Ben and the another is flowed by psychological time (Watanabe,1973). This view laid two things. First, it laid the foundation for understanding Woolf's philosophy of time and then it provided a key entry point for analyzing the interaction between time and space. In recent years, Fayzullaeva (2020) has focused on the inner world of females. Her main argument is that psychological time plays a key role in shaping female subjectivity.

Current researches prefer interdisciplinary approaches, especially in the field of spatial studies. For example, Lypka (2021) combined affect theory with feminist geography to analyze Clarissa's emotional experiences in Mrs. Dalloway and how she builds her female identity as in the urban space. The result revealed that Clarissa's spatial behavior demonstrated an autonomous and modern quality. Additionally, Ciocoi-Pop (2023) made a different approach. She did a study of multiple works by Woolf to explore the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces connect to identity construction, which enables us to understand the spatial narrative in Mrs. Dalloway from a comparison with more works. This really can broaden our vision.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Overview of Female Space Theory

Female space theory draws primarily from three major intellectual traditions.

First, early feminist writers laid its theoretical foundation. For instance, in her work A Room of One' s Own, Virginia Woolf argued that having a separate physical space is necessary for women to think independently, gain economic freedom, and engage in creative work (Woolf, 1929). This perspective raised space from a mere physical concept to a core issue intimately linked to female identity and freedom.

Secondly, the theory was deeply influenced by the "spatial turn" in philosophy and sociology. Henri Lefebvre pointed out that space is not a neutral container but a "product" continuously shaped by social relations and human activities (Lefebvre, 1974). Michel Foucault, on the other hand, analyzed how space becomes a stage for the operation of power, using concepts like "heterotopia" (Foucault, 1967).

Feminist scholars further noted that earlier research had missed the gender perspective. They strongly criticized the division of the "public sphere " and the "private sphere", arguing that this division is a social construct designed to maintain gender inequality. So domestic space was no longer seen simply as a warm and safe space but it could be a place that imposes norms and constraints on women. This marked the maturation of female spatial theory—space is not only a social product but also a gendered product carrying the markst of patriarchy.

B. Doreen Massey's Space Theory

In her work Space, Place, and Gender, Doreen Massey developed a highly influential relational theory called "rational space". The core of Massey's theory is her redefinition of space. She argues that space is not a static background but is dynamically formed through a complex social relations. According to this "relational space" perspective, Clarissa's walk through London in the novel can be seen as an active dialogue with the flowing social forces in the city, rather than just a simple movement on a map.

Secondly, she introduced the concept of "power geometry" to describe how individuals occupy different positions within social power structures, leading to vast differences in their ability to control and move through space. Taking Clarissa as an example, as an upper-class woman, she enjoys the class privilege of wandering freely in the city, while simultaneously being subject to the implicit constraints of societal norms governing female behavior. This vividly illustrates her contradictory position within the urban power structure.

The most crucial point is that Massie put space, time and gender power together and proposed the new concept of "gendered time and space". She believed that the linear and rigid "Big Ben time" actually represents the patriarchy, while the flowing

"psychological time" is closer to the real feelings of female's daily lives. From this theory to Clarissa, it is particularly clear that she constantly changes between physical time and psychological time, and through the most daily activities such as walking, solitude, and hosting partys. She gradually seeks and establishes her own identity. This process illustrates the principle that Massie wanted to convey that space is not merely a product of social relations and it can also be a place where social changes happen.

IV. CLARISSA'S CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE SPACE IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

A. Urban Wandering

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa actively constructs her own female space in the traditional male-dominated world. This process of construction is the focus of feminist criticism. As Peter Thomas Barry (1995, p. 89) put it, feminist criticism not only focuses on female writers, but also "examines how literature constructs gender identity". Thus, firstly, this artical will start from this perspective, analyzing Clarissa's street wandering and exploring how she constructs her female space in public .

Clarissa's stroll through the streets of London, it seems a simple outing. However, In fact, it's a temporary appropriation and reconfiguration of public space by a woman.Yet in some ways it is seen as a form of resistance that challenges traditional gendered spatial divisions. Thus, I will develop this argument from the following two aspects.

First of all, Clarissa's London wandering break the chain of those constraints of traditional masculine space. The traditional masculine space encompasses the areas of sensory experience, route selections, and architecture styles.

On the sensory level, what is so impressive is the regular chime of Big Ben. As Clarissa wandering or losting in losts of memories for some time, the chime acts as a reminder which seemes incidental yet it invades her consciousness carelessly and urged her to go to the flower shop hurriedly. It constantly remindes her of her living place. But she can ignore the chime by calling memories.

> *For having lived in Westminster-how many years now ? over twenty,-one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes... In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (Woolf, 2016, p. 4. Hereafter only the page number of this book referred to in parenthetical citations)*

It's a sign that the influence of the chime is indeed exist, but Clarissa has grown accustomed to and accepts its disturbance, actively seeking out beauty around her. She doesn't always complained of being chained down to the rules which dominated by the male behind the chime, instead embracing everything with positivity. In a world where the rules behind the chime cannot be changed, she continues to cherish life.

In addition, the air outside her window, the trees, and the rooks also draw her out. This is not the aimless wandering, yet she has already come to enjoy the act of walking itself, becoming a part of the city" (Wang, 2024, p. 12). "Looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling" (p. 5). She breathes in the fresh air, sees the trees wreathed in mist, hears the deep chime and the cacophony of bustling traffic. It is widely known that females were forbidden to walk aimlessly, stop to look for a long time or be immersed in the street for a long time in those days. So her sustainable feelings and aimless behavoirs reflect that she always try her best to break the chain of rules of traditional masculine space.

In terms of route selections, Clarissa does not proceed directly to the flower shop. Her route is not a simple, direct line. Before reaching the flower shop, she listens to the "symphony" of life in London in June while crossing the street, passes by a patch of grass where dogs bounce up and down , walks past exquisite store windows displaying artificial gems and diamonds, enters an utterly silent park, watches the traffic on Piccadilly, pauses the shops down the Bond Street, and finally arrives at Mulberry's, the local florist. This urban wandering constitutes a challenge to gendered space and time. As Rudenko and Komutstsi argue, urban space has traditionally been viewed as a male domain, characterized by purposeful, linear trajectories (Rudenko & Komutstsi, 2021). Clarissa's aimless and associative stroll, in contrast, breaks the chain of traditional masculine space.

Regarding architecture styles, different buildings represent different forms of power. The London streets are dotted with spaces that are physically accessible to Clarissa yet socially entirely closed off. The invisible government ministries, such as the one where her husband Richard works, and the so-called gentlemen's clubs. Both she cannot be allowed to enter. The government building where her old friend Hugh Whitbread works, mentioned in the text, is similarly inaccessible. Therefore, when describing Clarissa's wandering route, what comes into view are parks, florists, shops, and those exquisite shop windows, not the political zones of the masculine domain. It also reveals how Clarissa actively avoids areas dominated by men. Her aimless stroll, actually, avoid being discovered by others of her own agency.

Secondly, Clarissa's London wandering constructs some new and temporary feminine spaces.

In terms of social interactions, Clarissa transforms unequal relationships into equal ones. As she strolls through the London streets, she encounters Hugh Whitbread with a few brief greetings, and invites him to her dinner party.

> *But how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the mist; the hum; the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds; waddling; and who should be coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms, who but Hugh Whitbread; her old friend Hugh-the admirable Hugh!*

> *'Good morning to you, Clarissa!' said Hugh, rather extravagantly, for they had known each other as children. 'Where are you off to?'*
>
> *'I love walking in London,' said Mrs Dalloway. 'Really, it' s better than walking in the country.' (p. 5)*

In this conversation with Hugh Whitbread, Clarissa is no longer just a lowly listener. Although Hugh is a man of status. But for Clarissa, he is her beloved old friend, as evidenced by "the admirable Hugh" (p. 5). Clarissa also actively transforms the public and masculine urban space of London into her personal female space, seeing them as equals. This practice vividly interprets Massey's concept of relational space that space is constituted by the simultaneous presentation of social relations and interactions (Du, 2021).

In terms of her wandering path, she creates a space of her own. It is precisely this trajectory that breaks the masculine logic of public space-she does not proceed directly to her destination but, on the way there, passes through places that evoke a cascade of thoughts, seeking out the scenes before her as well as beautiful and painful memories. As revealed by the empirical research of Simona Sacchi, Giulio Faccenda, Daniela Ruzzante, Chiara Sparascio, Federica Spaccatini, urban environments are profoundly linked to gendered social categories, and Clarissa's practice carves out a space uniquely her own within this very association (Sacchi et al., 2025).

In the intertwining of memory and emotion, Clarissa reconstructs the public domain of London's streets into a feminine sensory space filled with private memories, emotional connections, and personal experiences. As Wang Keke (2024) points out in her research, the urban space of London in Woolf's writing is a fluid entity saturated with perception and memory, and Clarissa's London wanderings exemplify this perfectly.

> *'She could remember scene after scene at Bourton—Peter furious; Hugh not, of course, his match in any way, but still not a positive imbecile as Peter made out.*
>
> *…*
>
> *June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.*
>
> *For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, If he were with me now what would he say? - some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St James's Park on a fine morning-indeed they did. (pp. 6-7)*

After her encounter with Hugh, Clarissa thinks carefully of her life. The appearance of her old friend Hugh brings forth special memories of past stories. Her feelings towards Hugh are affectionate all the time, and that remains unchanged. For Peter, her former lover, the emotions about him are more complex, blending dislike, hate, but more nostalgia feeling. The warm air, the bright leaves, the pleasant conversation… These sensory impressions intertwine with the psychological time of her memories of Bourton, Hugh, and Peter, transforming the London streets into a vessel which contain the emotions and feelings of Clarissa's inner world.

Through this practice, Clarissa not only creates new female spaces of strolls but also finds an unrestrained self. Although she only mentions buying flowers, yet buying flowers is not just for this thing. It proves that "space and gender identity are co-constructed in continuous practice" (Wen, 2023).

B. Solitude in the Attic

If Clarissa's urban wanderings in London are open and free, then her solitary in the narrow bed on the attic is a long-term private space that she purposefully constructs.

For London strolls, Clarissa circumvents traditional masculine space by herself and then construct her female space. But in the attic, she chooses construct her female space directly. It includes two aspects.

First of all, Clarissa actively creates the attic which is a marginal female space for herself. This is a typical limited family space. Although within the family, it is far from the core social area. Thus it becomes a "space of the other within the home" (Wen, 2023). Zhang Wenqi (2022) analyzes from the perspective of power structure that it is an active retreat from the "center" discourse to the "periphery", allowing her to temporarily escape the identity of Mrs. Dalloway and just be herself. Wang Jing (2024) incisively analyzes Clarissa's "dual personality", arguing that the attic is the place where Clarissa truly want to live, temporarily separating from the social symbol "Mrs. Dalloway". Clarissa makes good use of marginality and isolation to create a world of herself, less likely to be discovered by the outside world. Actually, she makes the marginal female space get dominant right.

Secondly, within the attic's interior space, psychological time dominates physical time. Here, the clock time that governs the party preparations is insulated by outside. Also, Clarissa is alone, lost in thought of death, love, and marriage. Umida Fayzullaeva (2020) points out that Woolf profoundly depicts the inner world of females, and the attic provides adequate spaces for her inner world, elaborating on the two spaces in detail.

In the first space of the attic, the real space, Clarissa ponderes over her current marriage.

Lying awake, the floor creaked; the lit house was suddenly darkened, and if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed! (p. 32)

From this passage, she is aware of her own aging and cannot tolerate Richard's indifference. It seems as if there is an unbreakable veil of window screen separating them. She loves Richard, but her husband does not offer her a passionate and sincere response. Every day is a pretty mundane existence with dull routine.

In the second space of the attic, the memory space, Clarissa recalls her love. Burleigh represents an era full of potential, freedom, and deep female friendship. The following passage is a fragment of Clarissa's recollection of love in the attic.

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up.

…

Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it not to look at it-a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (pp. 33-35)

Clarissa recalls her pure love for Sally Seton, the soulmate of her life. She adores Sally's genuine freedom in her youth, a carefree quality that Clarissa longed to embody throughout her life. Her love for Sally is a genuine and passionate one, "Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips;" "The others disappeared; There she was alone with Sally" (p.35). That tender kiss expresses Sally's love and also made Clarissa fall deeply in love. But that kind of emotion could only remain in Bourton and could not be repeated. Bourton also becomes the standard by which she measures her current life. This memory seemes to comfort Clarissa, but also remindes her of the imperfection of her current life. What she did and thought in Bourton also shapes her future decisions, so she chooses the reliable Richard rather than the demanding Peter. Thus, this past space is not static but a "global sense of place" (Massey, 2019, p. 374) that continuously influenced her current life in London.

In the third space of the attic-the interwoven space of reality and memory, Clarissa contemplates the meaning of existence. When she hears the news of Septimus Smith's death, she is extremely shocked. However, her profound empathy enables her to identify with Septimus Smith's choice. She does not merely hear the news of his death but feels it deeply.

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself-had he plunged holding his treasure? 'If it were now to die,' twere now to be most happy,' she had said to herself once, coming down, in white. (p. 181)

She thought that "But this young man who had killed himself-had he plunged holding his treasure?" (p. 181). In Clarissa's eyes, Septimus Smith's death is a resistance to preserve the purity deep within him. In the society of that time, Septimus Smith could no longer live as he once did. He has experienced the horrors of war and the loss of his friends, so he could no longer enjoy the luxurious life and detested it. Clarissa also understands that his innocence was being eroded by the dark and corrupt society, "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy" (p. 181), and resonated with him. At this moment, she transcends her social self and connects with him through shared emotions, confirming the meaning of life to her through feeling and understanding.

Therefore, the solitude in the attic is not a passive escape but an active exploration of space. The contemplation in the attic shapes a diverse Clarissa, a "necessary ritual for confirming her subjectivity" (Lypka, 2021, p. 60), allowing her to better understand and embrace herself through temporary isolation from her social identity.

In the attic, Clarissa creates a female space that was different from her strolls on the street. On the street, she can enjoy the city life at her own pace, have brief encounters with strangers, and lost in personal memories. But the attic gives her a space to calm down and look inward. Here, external time is no longer important. Her inner thoughts flowed freely. And the boundaries between the past and the present, herself and others were no longer distinct. The attic, the street strolls, and the party to be discussed later constitute Clarissa's ways of construct femaist space to find a balance between integration and detachment, public and private, the outside world and the inner self.

C. Party Curation

In the space of the party, Clarissa also chooses construct her female space directly.

As the climax of the novel's plot, the party is Clarissa's most complex and core spatio-temporal practice. Here, her role is far more than that of a hostess; she is more like a meticulously planned director. Ana-Blanca Ciocoi-Pop (2023) argues that in

Woolf's novel, the meeting point of inside and outside spaces is a key moment for making one's own identity. And Clarissa's party provides such an intersection. This intersection also includes other spatial presences: the space of social relations.

Firstly, Clarissa creates a social relations space for herself. She transforms the living room into a microcosm, gathering individuals with diverse social trajectories, from the prime minister to old lovers, from former close friends to professional doctors, forming a microcosm of the "global sense" described by Massey (Du, 2021). Among them, Hugh, Peter, and Sally are important participants in her life. Their presence connects the past and present spaces of the banquet. Traditionally, banquets are nothing more than displays of power and status. But for Clarissa, the party is not about showing off herself; she wants to express herself more, communicate and interact with others, and create more bonds and emotions between people, rather than cold exchanges of interests.

T'Clarissa!' That voice! It was Sally Seton! Sally Seton! after all these years! She loomed through a mist. For she hadn't looked like that, Sally Seton, when Clarissa grasped the hot-water can. To think of her under this roof, under this roof! Not like that!

…

'But I can't stay,' she said. 'I shall come later. Wait,' she said, looking at Peter and Sally. They must wait, she meant, until all these people had gone.

'I shall come back,' she said, looking at her old friends, Sally and Peter, who were shaking hands, and Sally, remembering the past no doubt, was laughing. (pp. 168-178)

When she sees Sally, her excitement and joy are obvious. Even though they have been apart for many years, the emotions of the past are eternal when they meet again. She enjoys this atmosphere, greeting guests and bustling about, but she is happy. For her, this is not a punishment, but moving through various relationships. During this movement, she is actually exchanging and understanding herself with others. She doesn't like the Bradshaws like "She must go up to Lady Bradshaw" (p. 179). Lady Bradshaw is always showing off her success, which is based on her husband's achievements rather than her own self. This is different from Clarissa's mindset and essence in hosting the party. The contrast in her attitudes towards different people further proves that Clarissa is in pursuit of emotional relationships.

Subsequently, Clarissa creates a relatively stable, shielded space. Why is "relatively"? From the time Clarissa bought flowers, returned home, and stayed at home, the chimes of Big Ben reminded her of reality time and time again. However, the party blocks the intrusion of Big Ben's chimes, allowing her to immerse herself in the music, conversations, and thought of the party. In the space with effective barrier, she could recall the wonderful memories of her life and talk about the gardens and trees in the past. Meanwhile, time is no longer the simple numbers but is defined by the encounters of relationships, the recall of memories, and the emotions that comes in waves at the party. Time is no longer a straight line moving forward at a constant speed but a process with ups and downs. The existence of Clarissa is the core of this process. Through her presence and actions, she defines the significant moments in this space.

Finally, Clarissa integrates the internal and external spaces. For the party, it is an internal space in which the arrival, conversations, and memories of guests all took place. However, the news of Septimus's suicide suddenly introduced the death from the external space into the internal and joyful space, breaking the internal space that is temporary and stable . As a result, Clarissa retreates to the attic which is a second internal space and engages in profound empathy. Celiese Lypka (2021) interpreted this act as an emotional creation. By feeling Septimus's death, she is aware of the importance of her life. She incorporates this traumatic event into the spatio-temporal context of the party and integrated it with the party's time and space, completing the transformation from the "Mrs. Dalloway" to a truely self who is capable of embracing life and death, joy and pain. She knows how to creat and maintain the complex social space.

This integration of the internal and external spaces also makes Clarissa to have a clearer understanding of her own heart. She combines the passion of her youth, the responsibilities of a housewife, the feelings for the same females, and the thought of death. The ways of her thoughts are no longer simple but exist as a complex unified entirety. All the laughter, conversations, and thoughts guided her to delve deeper into her heart and explore herself.

V. CLARISSA'S CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH THE FEMALE SPACE

A. Memory and Present Dialogue

In the overlapping space and time of memory and reality, Clarissa searches for her past self and shapes her present self.

Clarissa's consciousness operates on the dual tracks of "clock time" and "psychological time" identified by Watanabe (1973). The deep chimes of Big Ben overlap and interweave with Clarissa's memories.

After chiming, Clarissa strolled through the park. She recalled, "She could remember scene after scene at Bourton——Peter furious; Hugh not, of course, his match in any way, but still not a positive imbecile as Peter made out…" (p. 6). This is the first time Clarissa recalled Peter from the Bourton days. As soon as Clarissa geting home, she is busy preparing for the dinner party. But Peter Walsh's unexpected visit disruptes the peace. "So surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning" (p. 39). It is clear that Clarissa was completely unexpected by Peter's arrival. However, "Still, he was in love; her old friend, her dear Peter, he was in love" (p. 45). It was uncanny really. She

inexplicably losts in thought and can't believe that Peter was in love with a young woman who has already been the wife of an Indian Army major.

In reality, this reminds her more of her marriage. Her marriage to Richard is merely imitation. Well, actually only she knows the loneliness and isolation within. She even thinks about to escape her current life-the life of Mrs. Dalloway. This moment indicates that the vibrant Clarissa in the old days, the Peter she is in love with, and the question of whether she is happy. All of them contraste sharply with her present life, triggering her intention to escape it. As Wang Jing (2024) astutely pointed out, this internal conflict is reflected in the duality of the positions of "Clarissa" which is her real and inner self and "Mrs. Dalloway" which is the social self of responsibility and performance. These are not two separate identities but a complex and unified entity of internal compromise, thereby constituting different roles of her identity.

At last Clarissa is not passively overwhelmed by the past bad or fine things, whereas she actively negotiates and interactes with them. For her, the present life is the result of continuous negotiation between memory and present life.

After Peter left, his description of Clarissa is: "Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present" (p. 49). In Peter's mind, she is memorable for the past but also tries her best to be real in the present.

In her final monologue at the end of the party, upon hearing the news of Septimus Smith's suicide, she retreated to a private room in the attic, a space for her inner self. At that moment, she does not reject to accept her past rle or her current social role. Instead, she integrates them. She notices her own guardianship of inner own world from Septimus's desperation and realizes that her party is her way of protecting that same inner space.

Her final affirmation and determination, "I'll have my party!", is the peak for this negotiation. It is her acceptance and affirmation of the identity that she has constructed and encompassed the memories of Bourton and the reality of Westminster. As Gu Jianrui (2021) pointed out, through this integration of different time, Woolf presents an identity that is not a fixed point but a continuous and flowing process.

B. Public and Private Dialectic

In a world where public and private spaces intersect, Clarissa explores her inner self in each of spaces.

The first private space, the living room, serves as a meeting place in the home and plays a significant role in social interaction. However, as a wife, Mrs. Dalloway is constantly restricted by her identity in this social area. The living room, which represents a restricted domain, is what Ciocoi-Pop (2023) called a "disciplined inner space" of social performance and responsibility. In the text, Clarissa sat alone in the living room waiting for Richard to return. "He was holding out flowers—roses, red and white roses" (p. 117). But these few roses held deep love from Richard, making Clarissa delighted, "But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers" (p. 118). This is her actual response sent back. In her heart, she also devotes to Richard Dalloway. But Richard doesn't understand what is going on Clarissa's mind. She get pleasure and joy from roses, but it cannot change her determination about having the party. In the eyes of her former lover, Peter, she is snobbish. And for Richard, she is a bit immature and childish. They don't understand that holding a party is an important means for her. As Richard Dalloway's wife, it is crucial for her to maintain social relationships. Richard requires this upper-class social network, but he couldn't make head nor tail of this relationship which is built up by one party after another. In terms of space, the living room is small, just an internal space; in terms of identity, Clarissa needs to constantly play the role of a wife; in terms of psychology, she cannot directly express her emotions even saying "I love you" obscurely and implicitly.

The second private space is the attic. When she retreated to the attic room, the narrow bed where she read Baron Murbach's memoirs is a active and autonomous act of seeking her own space. This attic room, as Celiese Lypka (2021) puts it, is "her own world", a refuge away from the demands of the family. But her small room is not completely isolated from the outside world, "She heard a hand upon the door. She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy" (p. 39). It can be seen that Peter's surprise visit disrupted her inner world, making her hurriedly tidy up her dress and quickly calm and clear her thoughts, getting back to the role of Mrs. Dalloway in the real world.

In the attic, she is gredging up memories of her youth and love with Sally, remembering Hugh's kindness and recalling Peter's calculation. Therefore, her private identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through resistance in space and psychology. The fragility of privacy proves the necessity of this performance. She must constantly play the role who needs solitude and meditation to maintain her fragile and real self .

The third private space is the window, a seemingly insignificant structure that is a critical space that both separates and connects the internal private world and the external public world. The relational space view of Doreen Massy is reflected here (Massy, 2019). The window frames a relationship.

Clarissa repeatedly uses this critical space for profound self-reflection. And as she looks out of the window at the old lady opposite climbing the stairs, she sees herself in her, sees herself going into her small room alone every day. She just watches in silence, without a word. This silent presence offers Clarissa a kind of solace and connection beyond verbal communication, constituting what Wen Jiaqi (2023) describes as a spiritual connection across space. The window allows her to remain within her private domain while her consciousness is connected to the outside world, seeking her inner self.

In contrast, the streets of London provided a seemingly public yet hidden and free space. Clarissa's strolls through London were typical spatial wandering behaviors. As she stepped onto the streets, she felt she became a part of London, experiencing a connection with "life; London; this moment of June" (p. 4). Here, she is a subject, an individual who understands, observes, and interacts with the world. Wang Kekuo (2024) believes that the urban space offers her a temporary liberation from the role of Mrs. Dalloway.

C. Subjectivity in Practices

In Ultimately, through private and public spaces, the practice of memory and reality, she seeks self-awareness and creates a subject space.

But actually, Clarissa was not a subject from the very beginning. In the novel, she constantly faces the risk of becoming an object: the object of Peter's judgment, the object of Richard's protection, and the object of society's expectations. Her journey of resistance is the process of regaining her subjectivity. Clarissa's resistance is showed and reflected in her daily spatial practices. Her wandering space in London, the claim to the attic space, and the control of the space of banquet are all efforts of autonomy of spaces.

"Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went, upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom" (p. 30). In the attic room, she refused to share the bedroom with her husband, a space symbolizing traditional marriage and status, instead chose a small room symbolizing simplicity, purity, and independence. This act itself is a declaration of spatial sovereignty. As Celiese Lypka (2021) puts that she is creating her own world. This space is where she withdraws from the role of "Mrs. Dalloway" and returns to her true self, "Clarissa." Her reading and meditation here are not passive but active self-reconstruction. By controlling this small space, she resisted the expectations of society for how upper-middle-class women should live and reside. And by moving through it in her own way, she realized the "spatial autonomy as resistance" as Du Liang (2021) expounds within the framework of Massey's theory.

She may not have overthrown patriarchy, but she created her own world within it. She manipulates the "geometry of power" in her environment to ensure that she is not just a trapped node but an individual who can define her own path and sanctuary.

The banquet is the most important space for Clarissa's subject construction through spatial practice.

It is far more than a social event; it is her way of self-actualization. As Celiese Lypka (2021) powerfully argues that Clarissa creates a world of her own through the party.

At the banquet, her past lover Peter Walsh and close friend Sally Seton gather. These people exist in her past and present, but the emotions have changed. However, the banquet provides her with a channel to connect past and present emotions, "They were talking: it seemed so familiar - that they should be talking" (p. 179). This allows her to be her true self.

In the eyes of others, the banquet is seen as a vacuous and futile social form, but Clarissa infuses it with significant life meaning. Her resistance is not through direct confrontation but through extreme affirmation. By affirming life, connection, and even momentary joy, she practices "spatial autonomy as resistance" as described in Massey's theory. When Mrs. B radshaw arrives, Clarissa describes her as "in grey and silver, balancing like a sea-lion at the edge of its tank, barking for invitation…" (p.179). In her eyes, Mrs. Bradshaw was the epitome of a wife, lacking her own thoughts, having no sense of autonomy, and being completely dependent on her husband. In contrast, Clarissa concealed her true self and presented her perfect side, hosting a party and creating a world. This was her most profound act of rebellion within a seemingly shallow and permitted female space. Finally, her ultimate joy upon returning to the party after contemplating death affirmed the fact that despite the constraints of time, memory, and society, she still existed deeply and authentically. "This thing called life, what does it mean to her? She understood that her gift lay in connection and creation" (Zhang, 2023, p. 397). The party allowed Clarissa Dalloway to become her own space most completely.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender identity is not a pre-determined fact. Rather, it is shaped at a deeper level by various spatio-temporal aspects of social life. The construction of a identity is far more complex. It emerges from an individual's inner world and involves continuous negotiation with the external social forces that what you should do. In Mrs Dalloway, Virginia Woolf effectively argues that identity is not invariable but is in a constant process of construction that continuously forged and reshaped with space and time.

The core argument of this paper is that Clarissa Dalloway's identity is essentially a result of construction with space and time. This view elucidated through Doreen Massey's feminist spatial theory. Her identity is not determined at birth but is shaped through specific practices with space and time. Clarissa demonstrates that the true self is not confined to a single role but includes past and present selves that are shaped by the attic cottage she lives in, the streets she walks on, and the social pressures she confronts.

Clarissa's strolls in London, her solitary moments in the attic and her careful planning of the party are not plot elements but are her ways of resistance. She doesn't want to be confined to the living room of her home. So she insistes on being herself on the public streets and in the attic, which clearly shows that she wants to become the true self. Although as a woman of the upper class,

she has to face various pressures from society and family, her way of seeking herself in the limited space indicates that she has independent consciousness. In contrast, the tragedy of Septimus Smith shows us another outcome: when a person's inner space is destroyed by external things and there is no space like Clarissa's attic to hide, it will drive you up the wall. His suicide indicates that if a person cannot handle the relationship between themselves and space properly, it may cause irrevocable damage.

At last, Clarissa's party becomes the peak of her identity establishment. This is her most powerful step towards self-realization. She connects her memories with the present and her public life with the private life, creating a space full of connections. After understanding the meaning of death and chooses to return to the party, she is actually choosing to live and to rejoin the life. This is not giving in but an affirmation of her chosen identity in a positive way. Through Clarissa's experience, we can see that identity can change with the alteration of space and time.

Today, everyone especially for females, can alter between different identities, find their identities in different spaces, and strive to live as they want.

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