VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY: A JOURNEY INTO THE INNER MIND

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*Mrs Dalloway*, de Virginia Woolf, es una obra cuyo tema principal es el viaje al interior de la mente de distintos personajes, y por tanto, puede corresponder a lo que generalmente se entiende por ficción "Stream of Consciousness", ya que en ella la "acción" es más "mental" que "física", y tiene lugar básicamente en los niveles previos al lenguaje.

Sin embargo, sabemos que este tipo de ficción necesitaba de una nueva forma en que expresarse, en palabras de Jeremy Hawthorne “a very new sort of novelist shell”. Así, hemos considerado las diferentes técnicas de las que se sirve Virginia Woolf en su intento de describir de forma convincente esta conciencia interior. En la Presentación Externa observamos cómo los pensamientos interiores de los personajes se expresaban mediante dos técnicas principales: Descripción Omniscente y Monólogo Indirecto. En la Presentación Interna, más compleja, examinamos el uso de la asociación libre, la sintaxis entrecortada y la introducción de figuras retóricas tales como la anáfora, el anacoluto y la repetición, que proporcionan esa apariencia de discontinuidad e incoherencia del interior de la mente.

Con idéntico fin, es decir, intentar una descripción convincente y aparentemente real del modo de funcionamiento del interior de la mente, Virginia Woolf usa imágenes y símbolos, lo cual parece corroborar la teoría de que la creación de símbolos es un proceso mental primario.

Tras considerar brevemente la cuestión de la unidad y organización de la obra intentamos obtener conclusiones sobre el propósito real del viaje: nos enfrentamos a una representación verosímil de la conciencia real o a una técnica artística deliberada para recrearla en la ficción.

Keywords
Stream-of-Consciousness Fiction
Indirect Interior Monologue
Omniscient Description
Syntactical and Rhetorical devices
Anaphora
Anacoluthum
Hyperbaton

Abstract
Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is a work whose main subject matter is a journey into the private inner mind of different characters, and therefore, it can respond to what is generally understood by Stream-of-
Consciousness fiction, since its “action” is more “mental” than actually “physical”, and it takes place, mainly, in the pre-speech levels of consciousness.

We know, however, that this kind of fiction needed a new form in which to be conveyed, “a very new sort of novelistic shell”, as Jeremy Hawthorne says. Thus, we have considered the different technical tools Virginia Woolf uses to try to depict this inner consciousness convincingly. In the External Presentation we saw how the inner thoughts of the characters were basically rendered by two main techniques: Omniscient Description and Indirect Interior Monologue. In the more complex Internal one we examined the use of Free Association, the broken syntax and the introduction of rhetorical devices such as anaphora, anacoluthum and repetition which give that appearance of discontinuity and incoherence of the private inner mind.

With the same purpose, that is, to attempt to make a convincing and seemingly real depiction of the way this inner mind works, Virginia Woolf uses Private Images and Symbolism—a use which seems to illuminate the theory that the making of symbols is a primary mental process.

After considering briefly the question of the unity and organization of the work we tried to draw some conclusions about the actual aim of the journey: are we dealing with a truthful representation of the actual inner consciousness or with a deliberate artistic device to re-create it in fiction.

VIRGINIA WOOLF’S *MRS DALLOWAY: A JOURNEY INTO THE INNER MIND*

We are all aware of the growing interest in the individual that began to develop at the end of the nineteenth century. Subjectivism and Psychology started to force their way through the already worn-out Realistic notions which had prevailed in the second half of the century. The emphasis was changing from society to the individual, and especially to the inner subjective mind of the individual.

At the beginning of the twentieth century this new direction was already clear in English Literature. A new generation of writers was decidedly moving away from the naturalistic conventions and views in search of a new kind of fiction which could let them get nearer the individual and his subjective mind.

Yet, this new content needed an appropriate form in which to be conveyed, that is, a new pattern: new techniques or, at least, a new management of the old ones was necessary to undertake this task.

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of the most significant works that mark this new direction in English Literature, with the added particularity of being one of the first attempts, after Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, to
explore the “feminine” consciousness.

From the first pages of Mrs. Dalloway it becomes apparent that this is a novel whose main subject matter could be said to be a journey into the private and isolated consciousness of different characters, and, therefore, it can be understood as an example of what is generally known as “Stream of Consciousness” fiction. Its action is more “mental” than actually “physical”, and it takes place mainly in the pre–speech levels of consciousness.

In Mrs. Dalloway we face a group of characters who are rather more “conscious” of their own “consciousness” than of the outer world, more aware of their internal thoughts than of their external actions:

Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that, perfect idiocy she knew (and now the policeman held up his hand) for no one was ever taken in. Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on the pavement, could have looked even differently! (my italics)

The narrator moves on a predominantly mental level, and cares more about the characters’ inner thoughts than about their external actions. This means, in a way, an interiorization of the conventional role of the narrator, and it implies that the boundaries which once separated the narrator from his characters are no longer so clear as they used to be, since, by going deeper and deeper into the characters’ minds, the narrator makes us “literally” face their inner consciousness.

There is not much actual “verbal action” either, and whenever there is any, it is often rendered through the mind of one of the characters. Most of the dialogues are a good example or this. They are not presented to the reader directly, but through the mind and the point of view of one of the characters who take part in it, as in this example where the pronouns are the clue to know what point of view has been chosen:

“And how”, she said, turning the crystal dolphin to stand straight, “how did you enjoy the play last night?” “Oh, they had to go before the end!” she said “So, they don’t know what happened” she said. “That does seem bad luck”, she said (for her servants stayed later if they asked her)...  

2 Woolf, Virginia, pág 36.
The first "you" clearly shows that Mrs. Dalloway is placing herself in a first person position, but Lucy’s answers are invariably given in third person plural "they", which is obviously being seen from the unalterable first person point of view of Mrs Dalloway—despite the false appearance of direct speech quotations—. As a result of this, the dialogue is presented to us exclusively through Clarissa’s mind; this impression remains constant throughout the work ("Some committee?" she asked, as he opened the door?"Armenians" he said; or perhaps it was "Albanians").

The important thing is not what is happening, but how what is happening is perceived by the different characters’ consciousness, and especially, by the heroine’s consciousness.

This journey into the private and isolated consciousness of the characters needs to be undertaken in a very special vessel. Indeed, as Jeremy Hawthorne says, Virginia Woolf has to find "a very new sort of novelistic shell".4

In our attempt to analyse Mrs. Dalloway we will follow, in many aspects, though not exclusively, Robert Humphrey’s approach to the technical problems in "Stream of Consciousness" fiction. Yet, we will try to go a bit further and to consider what these techniques are aiming at: artistic elaboration or reality?

In the External Presentation, we see how the inner thoughts of the characters are basically rendered by two of the four techniques pointed out by Robert Humphrey, that is: Omiscient Description and Indirect Interior Monologue.

In Mrs. Dalloway we see more of the indirect interior monologue, with its free indirect style characteristics, its use of third person singular and of narrator interference. The usual pattern of introducing this indirect interior monologue is as follows: a thought — a statement about who is thinking that thought — and a comment about what he or she is doing while thinking that thought: "It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs. Dalloway, coming out of Mulberry..."). This pattern is endlessly repeated throughout the novel:

Her only gift was knowing people by instinct, she thought, walking on...

... his life had been a miracle, he thought, hesitating to cross...

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3 Woolf, Virginia, pág 107.
4 Hawthorne, Jeremy; Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway: A Study in Alienation; London: Sussex University Press, pág 18
5 Woolf, Virginia; pág 16.
6 Woolf, Virginia; pág 10.
7 Woolf, Virginia; pág 103.
Because it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels, he thought, crossing the Green Park and observing with pleasure...

To a great extent this pattern of introduction becomes one of the most apparent clues and alerts us to the start of an interior monologue; it is one or its distinctive marks, as it were. It admits some little variations such as “he/she” — “could remember/would say/considered/knew/cried to herself...”, and some introductory particles which express continuity or association, especially “for” or “as for”:

As for Buckingham Palace (like an old prima donna facing the audience all in white) you can’t deny it a certain dignity, he considered... 

As a rule, this use of the indirect interior monologue is interlaced along the novel with an omniscient description which also tries to simulate the fluidity, subjectivism and discontinuity of the stream of consciousness. The omniscient description offers the possibility of conveying the thoughts of different minds at the same time, what we could call, using Jung’s words “the collective consciousness”:

A small crowd, meanwhile, had gathered at the gates of Buckingham Palace. Listlessly, yet confidently, poor people all of them, they waited; looked at the Palace itself with the flag flying; at Victoria, billowing on her mound, admired her shelves of running water, her geraniums; singled out from the motor cars in the Mall first this one, then that; bestowed emotion, vainly, upon commoners out for a drive, recalled their tribute...

Sometimes it is difficult to determine when the Interior Monologue starts and the Omniscient Description ends, and it is not uncommon to find free indirect style characteristics within an omniscient description, especially when reporting a dialogue.

As far as the Internal Presentation is concerned, Virginia Woolf tries to solve the two main problems which, according to Robert Humphrey, a writer faces when he tries to depict the inner consciousness, that is, the fact that a particular consciousness is “a private thing”, and second, that it “is never static”11. To that end, she will use “Free Association”, “Syntactic and

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8 Woolf, Virginia: pág 103.
9 Woolf, Virginia: pág 104.
10 Woolf, Virginia: pág 19.
11 Humphrey, Robert; Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel, Berkeley.
Rhetorical devices” as well as “Images and Symbols”.

With the use of Free Association, Virginia Woolf succeeds in simulating the privacy, incoherence and discontinuity of the inner mind. In her Free Association we usually find an interaction of the internal and the external life. Sensations from the outer world interfere very often in the stream of consciousness of the characters, and these sensations have very much to do with the subsequent fancies, anticipations or memories which are usually brought about by them:

Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray; clean silver for the party. All was for the party...

(...) They would come; they would stand; they would talk in the mincing tones which she could imitate; ladies and gentlemen. Of all; her mistress was loveliest —mistress of silver, of linen, of china, for the sun, the silver, doors off their hinges, Rumpelmayer’s men, gave her a sense, as she laid the paper-knife on the inlaid table, of something achieved 12.

In order to better understand the way in which free association is used in Mrs. Dalloway, we will examine now a single example where this process is “at work”:

‘That is all’, she said, looking at the fishmonger’s — ‘That is all’, she repeated, pausing for a moment at the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves. And her old Uncle Williams used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves.

He had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the war.

He had said, ‘I have had enough’. Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them.

Not a straw, she thought, going on up Bond Street to a shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party. Elizabeth really cared for her dog most of all. The whole house this morning smelt of tar. Still, better poor Grizzle than Miss Kilman; better distemper and tar and all ther rest of it than sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book! 13

University of California Press, 1954, pág 42.
12 Woolf, Virginia; pág 35
13 Woolf, Virginia; pág
To start with, we see how a stimulus from the outer world:—"the window of a glove shop"—leads immediately to a complex reaction of memories and "free associations" which reflect the ability of the stream to move in time and space:

1° First, Clarissa starts "remembering"—going back in time—(The main motif in this process will be "the gloves"):

  a) The war: before the war you could buy almost perfect gloves there.
  b) The gloves made her think of her uncle William talking about a lady and her gloves and shoes.
  c) Both the gloves and the war make her think of her uncle's death during the war.

2° Then, back to the present, she associates all this with her own passion for gloves, and immediately afterwards, her attention focuses on her own daughter not caring either for gloves or for shoes

A new influence from the outer world appears now: the "shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party". She considers her last idea again: Elizabeth only caring for her dog. And now, the flowers shop introduces a new motif: the party. A whole range of new associations will be brought about by this new motif:

  a) The whole house smelling of tar in the morning
  b) "distemper and tar and all the rest"

These associations concerning her party will be combined with the previous idea of Elizabeth only caring for her dog, and, at the same time, a new element appears here associated with Elizabeth and the house smelling or tar: Miss Kilman and the stuffy bedroom with the prayer book. This association, in principle, seems strange and somewhat incoherent to the reader, since he has not heard of Miss Kilman before and he knows nothing of her relation with Elizabeth yet. As a matter of fact, Virginia Woolf is presenting a private association here, in the sense that it's hidden from the reader who does not have enough information to discover the connection yet. By intentionally introducing an element of incoherence, this hidden association succeeds in causing the effect of discontinuity and privacy.

Apart from the Free Association, Virginia Woolf often relies on the use of Syntactic and Rhetorical devices in the internal presentation of Stream of Consciousness in the novel.

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14 Woolf, Virginia: pág 10
On the one hand, the use of a broken syntax is many times useful when trying to depict the broken coherence of the stream. In this sense, in Mrs. Dalloway—we find untied or unfinished sentences, few logic connectors and a general appearance of confusion and incoherence on the syntactic level. As in the following example where the enumerations and the repetition of the structure—"and" plus"-ing" form—emphasizes the effect mentioned above:

Devonshire House, Bath House, the house with the china cockatoo. She had seen them all lit up once; and remembered Sylvia, Fred, Sally Seton—such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the waggons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpenting. But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. 

Sometimes this effect is achieved merely by placing together untied sentences without any kind of connectors: "She prayed to God. She could not help being ugly; she could not afford to buy pretty clothes. Clarissa Dalloway had laughed...". This confusion and incoherence on the syntactic level is simulating the confusion and incoherence of the inner subconscious mind.

Syntactical devices are combined with rhetorical ones to help create that appearance of suspended coherence and discontinuity of the private inner consciousness: ellipsis, anaphoras, repetitions, anacholula... It will be enough to note just a couple of examples:

Still it was hot. Still one got over things. Still life had a way of adding day to day. Still he thought, yawning and beginning to take notice...

Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth and urbane.

The use of repetition especially draws our attention. The repetition of words, sentences and structures proves to be very useful in conveying haunting ideas as well as in representing the obsessions of the subconscious mind. Let's take as an example the passage where Septimus remembers his experience in the war and the time when he met Rezia. The obsessive idea that "he could not feel" comes up again and again in his stream of consciousness:

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15 Woolf, Virginia; pág 114
16 Woolf, Virginia; pág 59
17 Woolf, Virginia; pág 90
...and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him — that he could not feel (...). He could reason (...) these sudden thunder—claps of fear. He could not feel (...) scissors were rapping on the table; but something failed him; he could not feel. 

But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the tea-shop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him — he could not feel. He could reason, he could read... it must be the fault of the world then — that he could not feel.

Throughout the novel, we constantly find repetitive images and structures which, apparently, try to reflect the obsessive ideas and fixations of the inner mind. The most haunting repetition is probably “Fear no more the heat of the sun”, which appears frequently in the novel, both in Clarissa’s and Septimus’s thoughts. It is interesting to remember McLaurin’s comments about Hubert Waley on “repetition and the subconscious”. Waley comes to the conclusion that “the artist employs repetition in order to get down to that level of the mind at which, in Lawrence’s phrase, ‘things hang together in the deepest sense’”. Virginia Woolf uses repetition “to get down” to the way things are in the subconscious mind and make a convincing depiction in her novel of the way in which this inner mind works.

Within this Inner Presentation we’ll consider, finally, the use of Images and Symbolism to convey private associations.

This use of images and symbols to present the private mind rests on a rather widespread theory among modern artists which is based on the idea that the making of symbols is a primary mental process. As R. Humphrey asserts: “The chief impetus for reliance on symbols is rooted in the psychological experience which indicates that symbolization is a primary mental process”.

Accordingly, Stream of Consciousness writers present the symbol-making process as the mind’s natural way of working: the symbol is spontaneously formed as a way of reacting to the outer world, or merely, of giving shape to their inner thoughts.

In Mrs Dalloway we find quite an extensive use of symbols conveying personal meanings. It is a rather hinted symbolism with private and personal connotations which are not always easy to interpret.

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18 Woolf, Virginia; pág.
19 Woolf, Virginia; pág 28.
One of these private symbols is the moon in Peter Walsh’s mind – his private symbol of grief:

Of course I did, thought Peter; it almost broke my heart too, he thought; and was overcome with his own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day (...) And as if in truth he were sitting there on the terrace he edged a little towards Clarissa; put his hand out; raised it; let it fall. _There above them hung that moon. She too seemed to be sitting with him on the terrace, in the moonlight_ 22 (my italics)

This image appears spontaneously in his mind before any process of association starts, and gives shape to his inner emotional states. It is clearly connected with memories of the past at Bourton, with his relation with Clarissa and their breaking off. Near the end of the novel, this image will be wholly deciphered to the reader:

...in the moonlight... that awful night, after the scene by the fountain; he was to catch the midnight train. Heavens, he had wept!

Nevertheless, what really matters is, rather than the logical explanation—the concrete actual objective fact that brings about those emotional connotations—the way in which this image develops a purely symbolic value in Peter’s mind. In this sense, any depressing or disheartening situation is associated in his mind with “moonshine”: “And why, after all, does one do it? he thought, the divorce seeming all moonshine”22. The following lines are probably the best example of the fully symbolic value of the moon in Peter’s mind:

And it was awfully strange, he thought, how she still had the power, as she came across the room, _to make the moon, which he detested, rise at Bourton on the terrace in the summer sky_ 24.

Now the moon alone can stand for his grief, without any direct reference to it. The image has developed a fully symbolical value.

Another recurrent private symbol is the _tower_ in Clarissa’s mind:

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21 Humphrey, Robert; pág 81
22 Woolf, Virginia; pág 39
23 Woolf, Virginia; pág 48
24 Woolf, Virginia; pág 44
Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went, upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room 25.

The tower is Clarissa’s personal symbol of loneliness, solitude and privacy. It is always associated with her “attic room” and her “narrow bed”, the latter with all its implications of a lack of sexual and wholly satisfactory love.

This image of the tower is isolated, developing a fully symbolic value, in the course of a conversation with Peter, early in the morning, when, feeling deserted and alone all of a sudden, she “goes up into her mental tower”:

It was all over for her; the sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, (...) and Richard, Richard! (...) He has left me; I’m alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee 26.

A private symbolism which seems to be shared by different characters is that connected to images of “cutting” and “slicing”. These sorts of images are certainly abundant, as Allen McLaurin has rightly pointed out, though he may be overestimating their value within the work. According to him, Virginia Woolf is constructing a whole “keyboard” based on them: “a keyboard on which there is a scale running from smooth cutting to rough scraping, from inclusion to exclusion, from sensation to abstract symbolism 27. I consider it could be more appropriate to say that these images are just one more element in her symbolical keyboard. I agree, however, that they have a symbolic meaning within the characters’ minds connected with their feeling of exclusion, of being ‘out’:

That was it: to be alone for ever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone for ever 28.

A private symbol with very personal and particular connotations is the image of the diamond in Clarissa’s mind. It usually appears in connection

25 Woolf, Virginia; pág 29
26 Woolf, Virginia; pág 43
27 McLaurin; Allen, pág 43
* Woolf, Virginia; pág 129
with her search for her own identity, as in this example where she, as most contemporary heroines in a quest for their own identities will do, is looking at her own image in the mirror, trying to identify her own self:

That was her self-pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self(...) one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing room.\footnote{Woolf, Virginia; pág 35}

This image has been considered by different critics. Jeremy Hawthorne, for instance, stresses its ambiguity and sees in it connotations of “artificiality” and “insincerity.\footnote{Hawthorne, Jeremy, pág 11} I certainly agree in its ambiguity, however, as for its “artificiality” and “insincerity” I remain skeptical. I would say it stands for her changing but distinct self—her personal shape—which may vary in different situations just as the reflections of the diamond change when it is placed in different positions: “Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person...”\footnote{Woolf, Virginia; pág 35} An image which is connected with Virginia Woolf’s own technique, which is also an attempt to transcend fragmentation and assemble “that diamond shape, that single person...”

At any rate, rather than the different meanings which can be attached to the symbols themselves, what I want to stress is the fact that the process of symbol making is presented as a natural process of the mind.

Finally, I want to comment briefly on the problem of Unity and Organization of the novel; a problem common to all Stream-of-Consciousness fiction, as Robert Humphrey states: “the stream-of-consciousness writer cannot draw on the conventional use of plot to provide a necessary unity, he must devise other methods.”\footnote{Humphrey, Robert. pág 86}

Virginia Woolf’s depiction of the inner consciousness of different characters is not as chaotic as we could expect. On the contrary, it constitutes a perfectly organized and unified whole. We find a complex manifold design in the novel: Spatial, Temporal and Symbolical (one single day in the life of the characters in London, a real physical peregrination across London streets, the use of the mere and casual spatial contact to jump from one mind to another, the striking of the hours, etc), together with different structuring and unifying devices (particular events chosen as temporary “leading threads” in the narration). All these elements are constructing, little by little, and almost imperceptibly, an unified whole. Everything turns out to be “carefully” organized in the novel. In fact, “too
organized”, we could say, to be real. Something that may well lead us to the conclusion that, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we are not facing the reality of human consciousness, but a complex and elaborate artistic attempt to represent that consciousness.

Virginia Woolf was helping to create a new pattern—a new literary convention—in an attempt to account for a new subject matter which was being introduced in fiction: the inner psychological life of the individual. But we cannot forget that we are speaking of “literary patterns and conventions”, that is, of Art and not of Reality. Does the inner consciousness really work as Virginia Woolf represents it in *Mrs. Dalloway*? It probably doesn’t, (especially, if we bear in mind that, as Walter Allen says: “Her attitude to experience is aesthetic” 33). But, after all, Literature always means an artistic interpretation—and a deliberate re-creation—of the world; therefore, we could say, in this sense, that the aim of the journey Virginia Woolf undertakes in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is not the actual inner mind, but a conscious artistic attempt at re-creating the inner mind.

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