

Space, Dwelling, and (Be)longingness: Virginia Woolf's Art of Narration

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The supple and ever-present search for the possibilities offered by the narrative form in fictional writing corresponds to the use of the narrative as a mode of understanding and explaining our being-in-the-world in philosophy. The intimate liaison between the realm of fictional imagination and that of human everydayness inspires writers to seek ways to tackle issues of temporality, the conflicting character of human drives, and the ultimately unresolvable tension between finitude and infinitude. As a literary and philosophical category, the narrative remains an inexhaustible space for the exploration of the way we understand our lives. I propose a hermeneutic investigation of the interactions between the art of narration and the categories of space, presence/absence, and (be)longingness as evoked in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. This article engages Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity, and, more specifically, his notions of homelessness and homecoming, to shed light on the inimitable character of Woolf's artistic representations of the spatial dimension of human existence, reality viewed as both tremulous and solid, as well as of human embodiment and the disparity/closeness between the corporeal and the spiritual.

Keywords: Dwelling; narrative; space; Heidegger; Woolf; philosophical hermeneutics.

1. *Introduction*

Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), takes place on a single day in June soon after the Great War. The story sets off with the eponymous heroine, Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged woman and an excellent socialite, preparing for her party. The novel's plot is built on

continuous shifts between the past and the present. It is immersed in a time continuum with no sharp distinction between those two perspectives. Time stops and time is regained. The memories of events that are gone seem to be as real as those of the present time. Moreover, time, which is rendered in the novel through prolepsis and analepsis, is shown in its inextricable connection to space. Clarissa's manifold recollections are heightened by the grandeur and conviviality of a social gathering. In its pervasive interest in human temporality, *Mrs. Dalloway* provides multiple insights into the interweaving nature of the philosophical categories of narration, space, time, presence/absence, dwelling, and (be)longingness. Clarissa is shown as continually dwelling in two different time/space realms and, thus also two divergent states of being: the 'corporeal tangibility' of the present time of living the life of an upper-class lady and the internalized past time of retrospective wandering in thoughts to the places she used to know and love in her youth. The contrast between the emptiness of the embodied present and the rich in reminiscence mental remaining in the past is only subtle, and it is maintained by the narrative's constant movement backward and forward in time.

The narrative's spatio-temporal shifts serve to evoke the chasm between the spiritual and the corporeal. The novel examines temporality and dwelling as inextricably and meaningfully interwoven, as revealing something important about our being-in-the-world. Drawing on Henri Bergson's *la durée*, Woolf adopts for her fiction the notion of an interior, immaterial time, which varies from clock time (see Bergson 2004). Thus, although the historical time of the narrative's action is sketched precisely, it is mostly the psychological time that Woolf explores in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Bergson's differentiation was later appropriated by Heidegger. His notion of existential time, of that form of temporality which is uniquely integrated with individual consciousness, speaks to the integral nature of time and being for Heidegger (1962: 466–470). It is the Heideggerian perspective that is illuminating to Woolf's project. For Heidegger, it is one's ability to situate the present moment within the contexts of the past and future, as well as to assert one's autonomy within the constraints of external, determining forces that shape one's fate (Heidegger 1962: 416–417).

Woolf's fictional imaginings resonate with the precepts of Heidegger's philosophy of temporality while revealing a human being's capability of understanding as unfolding in time and reaching its peak in the moment of a profound apprehension of the inescapability of death. Clarissa is positioned within the present but remains intimately aware of the past and future. She strives to locate her being in the spatio-temporal reality, and it is only by identifying with the death of the Other (Septimus Smith), that she embraces the prospect of her own death and is able to accept her own agency and live out her fate.¹ This

¹ A detailed exploration of the significance of space in Woolf's fiction is offered, for instance, by Seeley (1996).

new opening helps her face the constraints of a life lived within pure facticity. The moment in which she contemplates the transgression of the barrier between life and death enables her to contemplate her own existence profoundly (*Sein-zum-Tode*). This overpowering intensity of understanding is enhanced by Clarissa's continuous juxtapositions of the past against the present. Reminiscing the past events, she bridges the rather unsatisfying present with the fulfilling past while reading and re-reading the story of her life as a meaningful whole.²

The novel's evocation of human finitude inspires us to contemplate how its narrative renders existentiality, and thus, space, time, and the human mode of dwelling. Clarissa struggles to appropriate the individuality of her world and become attuned to the rhythmical patterns of Being. However, her unique unrepeatability is buried under an urge to keep up a façade and comply with the requirements of social life. The possibility of imprinting her uniqueness into reality by understanding a certain kind of surrender as precious and fulfilling is thwarted. Her engagement in various distractions prevents an effective "plunge" into an authentic life.

A host of important similarities between Woolf's understanding of human existence as manifested in *Mrs. Dalloway* (and her other fictions) and Heidegger's philosophy of facticity encourages us to probe the intersecting paths of literary and philosophical discourse in their common attunement to our being-in-the-world, in which space, time, and dwelling feature as central categories. Woolf's understanding of existentiality is indissolubly interconnected with her view of authenticity. She differentiates between what she calls "being" that is, the state of being sensitized to something crucial about life due to a sudden 'shock' and the non-being—"the cotton wool" of everyday trivialities (see Olson 2003).³ Woolf's inimitable response to the quandaries of human existence, through which she upholds the exigency of living an authentic life, concords with Heidegger's insistence on the curious consciousness and his assertion of *Dasein's* authenticity in *Being and Time*: "being true as discovering is a manner of being of *Dasein*" (1962: 203). Similarly, Woolf's understanding of authenticity finds an important parallel in Heidegger's philosophy of facticity, which discloses the significant interconnection between being alone and being-with, and which is apt-

² Inspecting her life in retrospect, Clarissa becomes the narrator of the story of her life. Linking together the various elements of her life, she is capable of reading, interpreting, and bringing into a meaningful whole the events of her life. Woolf's embodiment of the rereading of a narrative of life concords with Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity, which embraces both the changing nature of the human subject in the course of time and the unchanging core of human subjectivity. Ricoeur avers that human life becomes understandable once the story of one's life is told (see Ricoeur 1991a, 1991b, and also 1992).

³ In "Sketch of the Past" Woolf confesses: "I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand—'non-being' (Woolf 1976: 70).

ly expressed in his own words: “By reasons of this *with-like* [*mithaften*] being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of [human existence] is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]” (1962: 118). The novelist’s hermeneutic thinking, which manifests itself in presenting her characters as living the mysterious suggestiveness of the patterns of Being—the relational being is part of the structure of Being—calls to mind Heidegger’s recognition of our individuation as embedded in mutual connectivity: “only as being-with can [one] be alone” (1985: 238). Moreover, Woolf’s meditation on human dwelling in time shows the paradoxical nature of absence as a mode of presence. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf, in a similar vein to Heidegger, reveals the intricate nature of absence in a human being’s incessantly repeated (*Wieder-holung*) and never satisfied search for a meaningful existence.

By bringing space, time, and dwelling to actualization, Woolf’s fiction provides important philosophical insights. Her hermeneutic sensibility, which enables her to discern the multi-faceted and non-restrictive nature of the phenomena of time and space and evoke them in fictional writing, resonates with Heidegger’s philosophical hermeneutics and allows his complex ideas to manifest in the beauty of her literary discourse. Set side by side, Woolf’s prose and Heidegger’s philosophy reveal the breadth and depth of the hermeneutic inquiry into that which is most fundamental in our being-in-the-world—an understanding of our temporality and our sense of space. Reading *Mrs. Dalloway* in tandem with Heidegger’s philosophy of facticity contributes to a better understanding of her fictional world on the one hand, and the fleshing out of Heidegger’s sophisticated philosophical ideas on the other.

2. *The mystery of dwelling.*

Time and space in Mrs. Dalloway

Mrs. Dalloway’s preoccupation with space in connection with our humanity has been the focus of many works of Woolfian scholarship (see Seeley 1996, Simone 2017, Weatherhead 1985). Emma Simone discerns the deep relationship between the sense of space and the phenomenology of being a human being in Woolf’s fictional imaginings:

Woolf’s representations of space demonstrate her understanding that such locations provide the individual with the potential means to carry out his or her intentions, form and gather memories, and feel safe and welcome; alternatively, and even simultaneously, Woolf’s writings signify place as the sight of threat, unease, and thwarted hopes and desires. Place facilitates our connections with the Other, and sense of inclusion, as well as our moments of solitude, isolation, and exclusion. From conception to death, place is a primordial and integral element of what it means to be human (Simone 2017: 64).⁴

⁴ By bringing into conversation Woolf’s aesthetics of space and Heidegger’s philosophy of facticity, I follow Emma Simone’s line of thinking that draws attention to the affinities between the former’s preoccupation with space as carrying human

Through the correlation between mental and physical reality—the crossing of physical thresholds is evocative of overcoming mental barriers—*Mrs. Dalloway* shows how the literary embodiment of space can say something crucial about human dwelling-in-the-world. Woolf recycles the literary motif of the physical barrier to signify mental partition; the novel's material divisions (windows and doors) represent not only the state of being separated from another reality but also the possibility of integration with it (see Olk 2014: 55).⁵ At the novel's outset, a depiction of Clarissa's excitement about a superb, June morning after a period of convalescence, expressed in her fervent exclamation: "What a lark, what a plunge!" (MD 1) discloses the narrative's preoccupation with the embodiment of space (Guth 1989). Plunge is a metaphorical dive into a reality larger than Clarissa's present way of dwelling. Her physical 'plunge', which arises from her desire to remain in oneness with outer reality, also foreshadows her mental transgression of the sorrowful state of semi-inflicted confinement to the life-narrowing space of the attic room where she spends much of her time. It is an act in which she immerses herself anew in the world that surpasses her individual, lonely, and constricted dwelling as a mode of being-in-the-world.

The novel's opening scene leads us to appreciate a variety of other episodes that demonstrate Woolf's keen interest in evoking space as one that partakes of and expresses a human longing to reach out for a reality that brings about a seminal change, a sense of completion and happiness. The desire for completion stems from a pervasive sense of finitude, the-not-being-at-home-yet, but it also arises from the need to transcend a particular mode of dwelling. Dwelling entails safeguarding, holding in esteem what is valuable, and preserving. A human being's being and dwelling are inextricably linked. Heidegger famously says:

To dwell, to be set at peace means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth (Heidegger 1971: 147).

Clarissa's mode of dwelling relates mainly to the past or to that which-is-not-yet. The brokenness of her life, mitigated with the façade of respectability, is the space that calls for transgressing the present as a

intentions, emotions, and memories and the latter's acknowledgement of the meaningful closeness of human temporality and space. Reminding us of Heidegger's seminal words: "The temporality of Being-in-the-world' is "the foundation for that spatiality which is specific for Dasein" (*BT*: 384), Simone also indicates that Heideggerian scholarship discloses his contribution to the hermeneutics of place alongside his focus of time (Simone 2017: 64–65).

⁵ Olk sketches the ways in which Woolf uses the trope of window, especially in Chapter 2.

way of dwelling. Woolf expresses this in images that evoke the traversing of the physical reality of the unsatisfactory present and are representative of a change.

Woolf pursues the well-known literary trope of a window to express the tangibility/intangibility of the longed-for reality. Open windows carry important connotations of freedom, revelation, and newness. Fundamentally, they signify a possibility of self-recognition that results from a person's reflection in the windowpane (as if in a mirror). Windows provide a mediated contact with another world and indicate semi-permeability as "...they foreground metaphorical materiality which disrupts any kind of direct and unmediated vision, and emphasizes subjectivity, fragmentation, selectivity, and an aesthetic distance" (Olk 2014: 56). Clarissa glances into a bookstore window display, savors the hustle and bustle of London through the window at the florists, and observes the older woman who lives opposite her window. Not touching or reaching the world behind the window, she partakes in it in a mediated way and experiences an intense spiritual communion with it. Most importantly, in episodes in which she opens the window wide (a few times throughout the novel), she reconnects with the exterior, gasping for air and grasping the outside as hospitable to her tangled self.

Asserting the symbolic significance of windows in the novel, Molly Hoff notices: "*Mrs. Dalloway*, ..., is a literary maze leading all to a conclusion that is duplicitous and uncertain. The novel is double-coded and designed to be read through more than one lens. Under the influence of epiphany, however, windows in the labyrinth offer moments of vision, and doorways lead into new states of being" (2009: 8). Woolf's use of the symbolism of windows reminds us of Emily Brontë's embodiment of traversing mental states through the crossing of the window/door/gate partition in *Wuthering Heights*. Clarissa 'resuscitates' after a period of convalescence by bursting the window wide open, much like the dying Catherine, who asks Nelly to open the window wide so she can breathe in the air of the moors in Brontë's novel. In this, she harkens back to a similar act when, as a young girl, she plunged into the open air through a French window at Bourton, her family house. This theme is an echo of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, in which Marcel's mother and grandmother are constantly concerned with opening windows and gasping for fresh air. Cognizing Proustian intertexts, Hoff ascertains that Woolf alludes to a wider cultural context. The critic reminds us that: "In ancient Roman culture, all doors, gates, and ways of entrance and exit are sacred as the symbolic sites of beginnings and endings" (2009: 11). These and other intertextual allusions sensitize us to the abundance of meanings evoked through Woolf's initial placement of her heroine at the border between two different worlds and draw our attention to the ensuing episodes, pregnant with meaning because of the crossing/sustaining of the barrier between two differing realities.

Severed from the mainstream of life energy, her possibilities curtailed, and dreams undermined, Clarissa, the 'captive' of a separate bedroom on the upper floor, makes a *leap* into a new way of being, which liberates her at the social and personal level. Her weakened self-agency regains its power. Clarissa's 'dive' is a subverted echo of the Heideggerian notion of 'thrownness'.⁶ Its evocative power and significance make one think of *Dasein's* alienation from Being and a human urge to belong. The 'plunge' symbolizes the entrance into the reality beyond one's present premises, the shift in a dwelling that arises from the spatio-temporal movement. Already *cast* into the circumstances of her life, Clarissa *casts* herself into a new reality, discarding melancholy and renewing her life's powers. Heidegger's insight into the nature of our being-in-the-world discloses the very essence of being a human being when he emphasizes that: "To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word *bauen*, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, ..." (1971: 145). Clarissa's bold 'dive' is a metaphorical expression of her wish to build, to dwell anew, which, at the same time, means to *be anew*. Contrary to Septimus, who, in a suicidal act, plunges into the abyss of non-being, she throws herself into being, into life.⁷

The symbolically rich image of a solitary dwelling in the novel suggests not only the idea of seclusion but also declining physical condition, and even more significantly, mental health in disarray. On recovery, Clarissa's acute sense of isolation caused by illness transmutes into a lingering sentiment of separateness from the usual conduct of her married life. Pain, frustration, or even despondency mark the new stage in Mrs. Dalloway's life—the narrative's clandestine message is that she has entered menopause (cf. Bettinger 2007). According to Victorian social mores, menopause is equated with a woman's demise. The narrowness of the attic room as a living space effectively represents limited possibilities and a decreasing level of life expansion. Clarissa is increasingly aware of being unimportant, neglected, or even rejected. The line from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, suggestive of death and repeated several times in the novel, plays the role of an intensification of her fear of passing away: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of the passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered" (MD 26).

⁶ The term 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*), which Heidegger introduces in *Being and Time* reappears in a variety of contexts in his *magnum opus* and is one of the key terms in his philosophy of facticity: "This characteristic of *Dasein's* Being—this 'that it is'—is veiled in its 'whence' and "whither", yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the 'thrownness' of this entity into its 'there'; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the 'there'" (Heidegger 1962: 174).

⁷ Septimus Warren is a war veteran who suffers from posttraumatic disorder. For the fear of being institutionalized, he takes his life away.

Mrs. Dalloway's physical (en)closure, which stands for her mental closure, is not only vividly conveyed through her confinement to a room whose singleness symbolizes the diminishing chances of fulfillment, aggravating the feeling of 'leaving the life stage.' Woolf expands on the symbolism of the attic room by adding an image of Clarissa's place of rest as becoming 'smaller': "Narrower and narrower her bed would be" (MD 27) (Hoff 2009: 65). The narrowness is suggestive of the lack of a loving party, and this hint is amplified by a seemingly innocuous remark on Clarissa's reading Plato in bed. According to Molly Hoff (2009: 65), an allusion to shrinking space in connection with the reading/loving process is touched by an undercurrent message of the possibility/impossibility of continued sexual life. Significantly, through the image of the immaculate cleanliness of the bedsheets, the narrative suggests that Clarissa's sleeping space is virgin-like: "She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. ... lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (MD 27).

Clarissa's undesirable state of entrapment in her house equals being devoid of the genuine possibilities of development and remaining in the well-known routines and incapacitating patterns of repeatability. Clarissa is compared to a nun, which is ironic given that she, like Woolf, is an agnostic: "Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. ... There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday, they must disrobe" (MD 27). The aligning of the nun-like retreat and a child's curiosity creates a one-of-a-kind intensity of dwelling in a space that is so very much different from others, so saturated with a sense of uniqueness and separateness. Shalom Rachman argues that the attic room symbolizes Clarissa's retreating to her true self—for a moment she is not a repressed Clarissa but disassembles her *self*, just like she undresses, to become self-composed anew. Her stay in the attic begets illuminating moments: "In the attic of her house, we get a glimpse of the 'attic' in her personality where her true being is locked up. It is here that her consciousness opens into depth, and she has a moment of vision, a moment of her true self" (Rachman 1972: 10). Musing on the symbolic function of the attic room in a broader context, Gaston Bachelard indicates the possibility of a positive connotation: the attic is a space where fears are gone: "In the attic, fears are easily 'rationalized' ... the day's experiences can always efface the fears of night" (2014: 40). For Clarissa, an attic is also a place of restored equilibrium; she often returns there in her thoughts to the happy past in her life and comes there to heal her memory.⁸

⁸ Significantly, learning about the tragic event of Septimus' suicide, Mrs. Dalloway retreats to her solitary dwelling in the attic room. Erkin Kiryaman makes an interesting observation about the role the attic room plays in regaining life strength and directs the readers' attention to the special element of recovery

However, the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* reveals that the growing melancholy, downheartedness, and hopelessness activate irrational forces in Clarissa's soul and mind. Mrs. Dalloway is not capable of a radical change in the vein of Edna Pontellier from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.⁹ She does not fancy leaving her husband or having extra-marital liaisons, and she is shown as succumbing to being disheartened and unhappy. The inner sentiment of not accepting her life and the fear of the impossibility of making it last are manifested in the spatial imagery suggestive of hesitance and unease:

... she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl (MD 26).

Embodying the destructive power of melancholia associated with the weakened will, the novel shows how gloomy thoughts can seek an outlet in the base, unrefined emotions that Clarissa strives to deftly control.

Undoubtedly, satiated with bleak colors, the portrayal of Mrs. Dalloway capably alludes to Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's mad wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (2006).¹⁰ Woolf's novel also echoes Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in that it depicts a female heroine who misses passion and love and is set against the backdrop of a complacent society preoccupied with possessing rather than living (see Laird 2014 for the intersection between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Madame Bovary*). Importantly, the evocations of space in the novel draw our attention to the inseparability of human psychology and the place of one's dwelling. Bachelard comments on the reflection of the human psyche in the physicality of the space we are dwelling in the following way: "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing veritable psychology of the house" (2014: 38–39). Like Bachelard, Woolf emphasizes in her fiction the indissoluble connection between a human being's mental states and their projections onto the places one occupies. The imagery of the isolated room that she deploys perfectly suits the solitariness that permeates her heroine's mind. Furthermore, the intimate permeability of human sentiments and the ma-

and its interconnection with memory: "The meaning of the attic, therefore, also involves Septimus' trauma entering Clarissa's mind. This vicarious effect explains that the attic is a symbol of memory and a metaphor for the archive is the complete construction of the mind" (Kiryaman 2016, 72).

⁹ *Mrs. Dalloway* shares an important affinity with Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which features a female whose entrapment in domesticity is a harrowing experience and, thus, calls for and results in emancipation.

¹⁰ Brontë's novel has become an important source of feminist criticism, reflected, for instance, in Gilbert and Gubar (2000).

teriality of a place of dwelling indicate the apparent reversal of the subject/object opposition. It seems very likely that, in addition to the psychology of a human subject, we can talk about the psychology of an object (the house) that evokes the feelings of a human being.

Heidegger makes an important point about the interrelationship between our human inwardness and the physicality of the space in which we live:

Even when mortals turn “inward,” taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging to the fourfold [the earth, the sky, divinities, mortals]. When, as we say, we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things without ever abandoning our stay among things. Indeed, the loss of rapport with things that occurs in states of depression would be wholly impossible if even such a state were not still what it is as a human state: that is, a staying with things (Heidegger 1971: 155).

With a parallel zest, Woolf interconnects the inner states of the characters’ minds and their reflections in the materiality of objects. The space of the enigmatic attic room can be understood in a double-fold way. On the one hand, this room is an allegory of her inward journey—the attic is an inner chamber and represents the soul’s self-reflection. Woolf recycles here the “introspection topos”—the human capability of examining the inner workings of her mind (Hoff 2009: 64). On the other hand, the narrative suggests that an attic is a real place satiated with tender feelings of seclusion. If we view the attic room as a real, physical space, the question of whether Clarissa’s continuing stay there can be viewed as solitary detention and is dictated by the outside circumstances that beget resignation and unfulfillment, or if it is a conscious decision of an integrated ego remains unanswered.¹¹ However, the latter option seems to be rather unlikely since Clarissa is pictured as a sober, self-contained even if disconsolate individual. Mrs. Dalloway reflects on her life from hindsight, and although the narrative is not explicit about her dejection, profound sufferance arising from a lack of authenticity tints her meandering thoughts. Like Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Mrs. Dalloway is oddly alien to her social environment and does not succumb to its shallow and facetious lifestyle. A broken-hearted individual, whose youthful and true love was replaced by a business contract marriage, Clarissa is on a continuous search for a sense of belongingness and fulfillment.

Clarissa’s pursuit of a place she would deem as one she belongs to draws our attention to the notion of separateness as understood by Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the notion of *de-severance*, which stands for ‘bringing close,’ making close what was/is severed. He asserts: “‘De-severing’ amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close” (1962,

¹¹ An engaging interpretation of a ‘room’ in a broader sense and context in Woolf’s writings is offered in Stevenson (2014). Stevenson claims that both ideologically and fantastically room in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One’s Own* represents femininity.

23: 139). However, what is meant here is not necessarily a decreased physical distance, although de-severance may include the tangibility of distance understood as a measurable reality. Rather, the phenomenon of *de-severing* relates to one's availability for practical activity. The 'near-by-ness' of some realities is counterpointed with the state in which these realities are readily available. Diminishing the role of the physical, Heidegger proposes a far subtler insight into the dichotomy of closeness and remoteness, which differs from a traditional, Cartesian understanding of space. Heidegger's gloss on space, which is attuned to a more delicate and nuanced perception, accounts for a vaster range of responses to the spatiality of being in the world. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf invites us to reconsider the closeness/remoteness and separate-ness/connectedness dichotomies. Clarissa dwells in a time and space that are remote. However, it is precisely in this spatio-temporal reality that the sense of disconnectedness vanishes. The spatial remoteness of the seaside (she imagines herself to be "... far out to the sea...") and the inaccessibility in time (Clarissa's youth) vanish as those two milieus: the seashore and the family home are exactly what Clarissa's consciousness holds as readily available.

3. *The intricacies of belongingness.* *Homelessness and home-seeking*

If the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses on the relationship between material and spiritual realms, it equally engagingly investigates the disparity between the corporeal and spiritual *be-longing*. The clash between materiality and spirituality is potently evoked in the images of Clarissa's London walks. Enjoying a city stroll in her thoughts, she either visits the seaside (her soul seems to hone an unflagging attachment to the seascape) or dwells in the remote past when she was a young girl in her family home in Bourton. In her love of London walks, Clarissa resembles Woolf herself and is her stand-in. For Woolf, London is the place that "... perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives [her] a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble, save that of moving [her] legs through the streets" (D3: 186). Clarissa's mental dwelling betokens, at the same time, her sense of belonging. The phenomenon of *be-longingness* encompasses human longing: the passionate yearning for the place one loves, is fascinated with, cherishes as a former dwelling, or desires as a place of the future dwelling. Emotionally, Clarissa belongs wholly to the past, when life seemed to be easier and promising happiness.

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* reveals that the interrelation between (be)longingness and space—a spatially determined sense of rootedness or uprootedness—is reflected in the tension between communicability and incommunicability, as that which is communicated is just the surface level of the understanding of human existence. The

novel shows that a sense of belongingness is conveyed via the incommunicable—Clarissa belongs there where her words cannot reach. Her existential situation is one of an acute detachment from the reality she seemingly belongs to. Repressed, playing the role of a hostess and a social artisan, she imagines herself enjoying the freedom of the world not confined to her place of dwelling (her London house)—the seashore symbolizes for her a vaster perspective of life: “She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, far out to the sea and alone” (MD 6). Significantly, the narrative proposes an understanding of belongingness as a poignant sense of *longing* rather than a blissful and facile identification with a particular place. Furthermore, the sense of belongingness in the novel overlaps with that of *home-seeking*.

Mrs. Dalloway evokes Heideggerian notions of homelessness and homecoming.¹² The first level of Heidegger’s understanding of *not-being-at-home* as reflected in Woolf’s novel is related to the portrayal of Clarissa’s perception of her existence as profoundly fragmented and uprooted, which is indicative of a deep sense of incompleteness and an impossibility to ever attain completion. Descriptions of Clarissa’s place of dwelling pinpoint the acuteness of her sense of not being-at-home. On the one hand, the minute details show the physical tangibility of dwelling, on the other, they reveal Clarissa’s inner sensation of not belonging. For instance, the hall in her house is compared to a vault, which is suggestive of death, descent, and degeneration. It was “... cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door, and she heard the swish of Lucy’s skirts, she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions” (MD 25). The darkness and unpleasantness of the vault deconstruct the expected safety and coziness of the hall as the entrance to other rooms in the house. The rich symbolism of disintegration at the first level takes us to the second layer of meaning. The state of homelessness implies more than not dwelling in a building, understood in material terms. Clarissa’s way of dwelling symbolizes her unremitting search for a home, for something she does not comprehend. Nonetheless, this something occupies her mind as she craves the fulfillment of her needs and longings associated with being-at-home.

Clarissa’s predicament is that of an influential and affluent woman who is mentally homeless; the evanescent, perishable joys of restless socializing turn out to be created along faulty lines; they do not bring

¹² Simone’s Heideggerian study of Woolf’s *oeuvre* emphasizes the novelist’s understanding of the notion of home and homelessness as resonating with Heidegger’s: “As Woolf’s textual representations repeatedly demonstrate, for the outsider located with society, a relentless sense of homelessness is not necessarily attached to any particular space or place; rather, this mode of Being is indicative of such an individual’s overarching sense of Being-in-the-world” (Simone 2017: 103). In this part of the essay, I point to the ontological perspective of home-seeking as the core of Woolf’s hermeneutic understanding of a human being as an internal émigré in search for home that is to become hers.

her any closer to being-at-home. However, Woolf's understanding of homelessness and home-seeking surpasses this first level of apprehension—Clarissa's not being at ease at the place of her dwelling. What happens is not only a particular kind of awkwardness, but rather Clarissa experiences homesickness that can never be satisfied as it is essential to her way of being in the world. Woolf's embodiment of homelessness resonates with Heidegger's philosophy, which illuminates the state of existential homelessness in its search for the lasting sense of dwelling—the very essence of dwelling. Heidegger emphasizes a human being's continuous journey to reach home; this peripatetic aspect is crucial. As we are alienated from Being and are searching for Being, we are also away from home and searching for a home:

A human being experiences alienation from Being and is constantly in search of Being. Throughout the history of Being's concealment and disclosure, the human being is on the *path away from home*. Calculative thinking is a mode of being in the realm of homelessness in a world devoid of God. Heidegger understands the human being as essentially itinerant, under-way, on a journey home, in search of the essence of dwelling (Wierciński 2019: 253).

Crucially, in her disappointment with life and the poignant feeling of barrenness, Clarissa is on her journey to understand her *not-being-at-home-yet*. Her existence is shown as if enveloped in a thick fog that conceals the truth about Being and disables her from self-understanding. Clarissa's sense of not belonging is not only phenomenological but ontological as she exists in the state of oblivion to Being.

A closer examination of Heidegger's explanation of the phenomenon of homelessness indicates that we are always exposed to the forgetfulness of our connection to Being, rather than being able to overcome the hiddenness of Being:

Homelessness is, for Heidegger, the condition of a human being painfully exposed to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the forgetfulness of Being, which is the forgetfulness of our own belonging to Being: *Seinsvergessenheit* is *Seinsverlassenheit*. Homelessness is the dwelling between Being's self-concealment and our inability to address the truth of Being, not by overcoming its hiddenness (which was the task of Western metaphysical thinking), but by accepting the lack of its total transparency for us and welcoming its withdrawal (Wierciński 2010: 232).

The narrative's constant shifting backwards and forwards in time heightens the sense of a search for home. Clarissa is both attached to and detached from her earthly home. She searches for a deeper understanding of a possible attachment to her earthly dwelling and for what is beyond it.

Mrs. Dalloway is an exile who does not remain in oneness with the life that she lives and banishes herself from the possibility of living life to its fullest, to understand its very core. As an internal émigré, she is doomed to never experience the joys of unity between outer and inner reality. Heidegger's philosophy of human finitude cogently describes the

state of being an exile and the need to free oneself from an acute sense of being separated from one's home. Heidegger prioritizes meditative thinking (*besinnliches Nachdenken*) over calculative thinking (*rechnendes Denken*). The former has the power to put us on the right path to recovering from our sense of homelessness. Our quest for dwelling cannot be scathed by paying our full attention to technological advancement or metaphysics (Heidegger 1973: 109; cf. e.g., Wierciński 2010: 231), but rather, it should focus on the seeking-of-our-home. Clarissa's journey through time is shown as re-iterative; she moves in circles, shifting back in time and moving forward to inhabit anew the present time. And this scheme powerfully emphasizes her search for a genuine attachment to her place of dwelling and the worrisome seeking of the consummation of her longing to belong, to find a home. Her way of thinking subscribes to the Heideggerian proposal of a specific sense of attachment. Quoting Heidegger's words, Wierciński points to the philosopher's inimitable way of understanding attachment: "In our detached attachment to the world, we must discover that 'it is one thing just to use the earth, another to receive the blessing of the earth and to become at home in the law of this reception to shepherd the mystery of Being and watch over the inviolability of the possible'" (Wierciński 2010: 231).

The pursuit of fulfillment is powerfully evoked in the novel via the juxtaposition of the inner and outer state of being. The embodiment of the potent (dis)connection between the interior and exterior takes on a special value in the narrative's well-pronounced discrepancy between Clarissa's inner life and her persona—the outer realization of self. This clash is coterminous with the rendition of space in the narrative. Clarissa's London residence is both the source of joy because of the excitement of her social life and the source of her spiritual suffocation, the agony of her solitary soul. Anticipating the aura of the forthcoming event of the party, the initial lines of the novel introduce us to the ultimacy of Clarissa's intense delight and exhilaration: "The doors will be taken off their hinges. ... And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge!" (MD 1). Taking the doors off their hinges to provide more room has a deeper symbolic meaning; not only does this show Clarissa's need for a vaster, more spacious place for her party, but a desire for an ample, capacious way of being, her wish to expand 'self' and to authenticate her life. The physical unhinging can also symbolize one that happens on a psychological level—going deranged, unbalanced, irrational—the letting loose of the otherwise constrained mind, which does occur when Clarissa contemplates the death of a stranger, a mentally disturbed war veteran, Septimus Warren. Significantly, the narrative offers a deeper level of understanding of the presence/absence dichotomy: the profound sensation of being more at home (understanding more) because of witnessing trauma.

4. *Presence, absence, and the authentic life*

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Dalloway's presence is shown in terms of *absence* rather than a real presence—she is present in her body for that which happens but is absent in her soul. The flimsy barrier between being-there and non-being is rendered in the narrative's focus on the pronouncement of Clarissa's inner life. Her interior world is stranded between two divergent poles that express her two opposite drives: being on her own and socializing. In depicting Mrs. Dalloway's struggle to be spiritually present, Woolf alludes to the tenets of the Western philosophy of solitude. In classical and Christian tradition solitude is viewed as something that takes us to tranquility, as the space where one can find one's authentic self. Western thought also embraces the Enlightenment view which accentuates that the most powerful remedy for a human being and the space where one can find the truth is socializing—being in dialogue with others, the appraisal of which can be traced back to ancient Greece and the common practice of conversing with friends as the perfect mode of being (see *The Philosophy of Solitude* (2014) Melvyn Bragg in conversation with Melissa Lane, Simon Blackburn, and John Haldane).

Mrs. Dalloway endorses Heidegger's understanding of Being as presence and his philosophical stand on absence.¹³ Andrew Hass emphasizes that for Heidegger, absence is a mode of presence: "Being is not just present or presence, but also absence or absent. So, being absent is a way of being, not merely a privation. This necessitates destruction or deconstruction, or de-structuring of the history of philosophy for Heidegger" (Hass 2018: 3). The narrative forefronts absence rather than presence; presence is continually satiated with absence. Clarissa remains hardly present to the flow of the present time, rather, she dwells in the seemingly more fulfilling past, which promised future happiness, and which is no longer existent, and thus dwelling in it can be viewed as a spectral presence. However, something other than the phantom presence is meant here. Clarissa's awareness of the lingering energy of life, which she perceives as active in the past, causes her to be present to it while being absent to her current dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Being absent to the present does not merely reflect a psychologically grounded truth about a human being who seems to be lacking contentment with what is happening at present. Most importantly, the narrative reveals that absence is the time of waiting for presence as a revelation of Being. And, thus, 'presence in absence' is the moment of awakening when 'the now' breaks through, both revealing and conceal-

¹³ Hass explicates Heidegger's inimitable take on presence thus: "[T]he history of philosophy translated Aristotle's original understanding of being, which he called *ousia* as 'substance'. So we remained in the history of philosophy wedded or loyal to this translation of *ousia* and couldn't see that this was actually a mistranslation. The translation should have been 'presence.' This is Heidegger's contribution to the history of being, because he understands that being is presence" (Hass 2018).

ing Being. The narrative shows the paradox of the ‘now’ which rests on the interplay of the concealment and unconcealment of Being. In the moment of the surrender to the ‘now,’ Clarissa inhabits an awakening to Being on the ontological level.

The question of presence and absence in the novel interweaves with the issue of authenticity. Clarissa lacks a more authentic and alive happiness, deeper than the surface enjoyment and extravagance of throwing parties. Without a shadow of a doubt, the image of a vault, which suggests the idea of death, is carefully selected to express the heroine’s empty, soulless, and rather sad way of being. The veneer of her rich social life masks the barrenness and disillusionment of her adult life. There is a clear allusion here to the Gospel image of the whited sepulchre—the beautiful outside that conceals rotten morality, which can be understood more broadly in the novel as a state of dejection, an abyss, or limbo that prevents true contentment and fulfillment.¹⁴

Although the narrative is not explicit about Clarissa’s depressive thoughts, her peculiar agitation, which can be discerned the moment she learns about Septimus’ death, reveals that, like the pain-stricken war veteran, she no longer sees life as an ultimate value and fancies the idea of ending it up. Oddly enough, the death of the Other is a source of empowerment, a moment of authenticity, and an important *Kehre* in which she regains her capability of appreciating both life and death.¹⁵ The authenticity that comes with contemplating death leads us back to Heidegger’s philosophy of facticity, and specifically to the concept of being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). Heidegger makes it clear that our human existence continually remains under the spell of death—our lives are determined by the prospect of death. However, as he claims, it is only through an attentive awareness of death that we can live our lives authentically (see Heidegger 1962: 231–240).

Clarissa’s way of being and dwelling is marked by a dearth of authenticity; her superficial existence is narrowed down to an accumulation of sensations that are expected to bring about aliveness, but at their best, they are merely expressive of her high social status. Mrs. Dalloway is rich enough to pursue a life of pleasure and appearances rather than moral values: “Clarissa Dalloway was the quintessence of upper-class English rectitude, if in “upper-class English rectitude” we include the ability to command a considerable household staff; to throw large, lavish parties that seem to have been effortless; to not only charm every guest but to remember every guest’s name” (Cunningham 2019: 3). The question of the authenticity of Clarissa’s life is satiated with the eerie sensation that her presence is somehow not succumbing to the common expectations of what it means to be present. One may

¹⁴ See Matt 23: 27 <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/search.php?hs=1&q=whited+sepulchre>

¹⁵ I use the term, *die Kehre* (the turn) as an echo of Heidegger’s name for his radical shift in thinking after *Being and Time*. Cf. e.g., Martin Heidegger, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/#TurCo>. [accessed 16 Apr 2022].

wonder if Mrs. Dalloway's presence is a mindful presence. The answer is two-fold: on the one hand, she is hoping for renewal, the restoration of her physical and mental strength. On the other, her mind is densely enveloped by the thoughts of the past as if never attuned to the demands and rather doubtful bliss of her present married life.

The ending page of the novel emphasizes that Clarissa's embodied presence is triumphant, most desirable, and instantly associated with a sense of fulfillment as it indicates the victory of the depth of feelings: "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (MD 180). She fills the room with her presence—most importantly, her self is now more integrated and connected to the authentic living of life, but this is an image of Clarissa filtered through the eyes of her former suitor, Peter Walsh. Undoubtedly, two sentiments contribute to Mrs. Dalloway's mental composure: the lingering, though unfulfilled, love that she feels for Peter, and her apprehension of trauma—the death of the Other. Her relationship with Peter plays a significant role in Clarissa's display of authenticity; forsaking her true love, she defies the possibility of living an authentic life. Notably, the uncanny closeness of her psyche and that of Septimus, as well as the experience of his death bring her back to an authentic state of being. One could also pose a question about the significance of Clarissa's other close relationship—her youthful love for Sally Seton, which she represses and abandons—for the authenticity of her life (see Haffey 2010). Succumbing to this love would mean flouting Victorian morality, and Mrs. Dalloway is shown as not truly able to transgress the boundary of conventionality, even if that could possibly mean an actualization of her genuine being.

5. Conclusion

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* features the drama of a human being whose life is not only stranded between finitude and infinity but also between belonging and not-belonging, solitude and companionship. Clarissa Dalloway's existential situation is one of an acute detachment from the reality she seemingly belongs to. However, Woolf transcends the cursory understanding of human attachment to and detachment from *home* and makes it into a philosophical issue. Her novel reveals how our temporality and finitude determine the way we view our being-at-home, home-seeking, and homelessness. Clarissa's way of being is shown as fragmented, and her inner life is satiated with recollections of the past. Repeatedly moving in flashbacks to the time of Clarissa's youth, the narrative offers the unfolding of a world of inwardness. The heroine's introspective thoughts direct our attention to the loosening of the barrier between different states of being. Presence and absence seem to be no longer viewed as binary oppositions. In this respect, Woolf's narrative representation of those two different states of being resonates with Heidegger's philosophy of facticity and his view of absence as a mode of presence.

The one-of-a-kind addressing of the (dis)unity of presence and absence in the novel is also entangled with the notion of authenticity. The vacillating borderline between being present and being absent invites us to see that an authentic existence relies on the acceptance of a continuous search for a home, understood philosophically, an acknowledgment of the lack of total transparency of our being-here, and an openness to Being revealing itself to us in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. The quandary of authenticity interlocks with our recognition of the dilemma of incommunicability. Clarissa's complex inner life escapes any easy form of communication with the Other. Words serve their role of expressing the richness of the interior of the human mind and, at the same time, in experiencing our finitude, we are not capable of communicating fully that which resides in the depths of our hearts. This is what Clarissa's condition consists of. Woolf's representation of the spatial dimension of human life in narrative art encourages us to discover that reality is both tremulous and solid, and our human embodiment is fully immersed in the materiality of being-in-the-world, but also transgresses the material and corporeal dimension of being. Woolf's narrative art is the inexhaustible wellspring of knowledge of how to approach the phenomenon of our being-in-the-world, how to understand presence and absence in the light of our human finitude, and how to tackle the fascinating and problematic notion of dwelling in the context of temporality. *Mrs. Dalloway* invites us to delve deeper into our existential situation and modes of dwelling in this world, as well as our burning desire to find a home, belong, and be free of the agony of homelessness.

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