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‘Valuable time, time irretrievable’¹

An analysis of temporality in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and
Gerard Reve’s *The Evenings*

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¹ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 15

Introduction

Time is essential to any story. For any human, and so any storyteller, it is hard to imagine something taking place in the absence of time. The most elemental definition of a story might be as a series of events being described in a certain order²—and while this order is not always necessarily chronological, it does require time to be conceivable. Any story that attempts to restrict time, seems only to thereby increase the significance of it. For instance, James Joyce's *Ulysses*—which is generally considered to be the benchmark modernist novel³—tells a very complex and long story that takes place in just one day, with many scenes even taking place at exactly the same time. Yet, while the amount of time told is limited to a near-minimum, the passing of it is only more noticeable to the reader, who is constantly reminded of the temporality of the events taking place.

Point being that, while time is important to all stories, in some it is so more explicitly. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Gerard Reve's *The Evenings* (1947) are novels in which time plays a notably important role. In both works, time is not merely the medium through which events unfold, but one of the principal elements through which meaning is generated. These novels do not simply take place *in* time; rather, they are *about* time, in the sense that they thematize the experience, awareness, and pressure of temporality itself. In both cases, the reader is not allowed to forget that time is passing. On the contrary: the passing of time is repeatedly announced and reflected upon. Bells strike, watches are checked, evenings are counted down, and days move relentlessly toward their endpoints. In this way, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* invite us to consider how time shapes whatever happens to their characters, and how living within time becomes one of the central problems of modern existence.

At first glance, the two novels appear to have little in common. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a canonical English modernist novel, celebrated for its stylistic experimentation, lyrical prose, and stream-of-consciousness technique. It follows a range of characters through a single June day in post-First World War London, moving fluidly between minds and moments, and culminating in a party hosted by its eponymous protagonist. *The Evenings*, by contrast, is a sober, almost stubbornly unadorned Dutch novel, set during the final ten days of December 1946 in Amsterdam. It chronicles the monotonous daily routines, conversations, and thoughts of Frits van Egters, a young man living with his parents in the aftermath of the Second World War. Where *Mrs. Dalloway* is often described as luminous and lively, *The Evenings* is famous for its bleakness and sense of stasis.

Yet it is precisely this contrast that makes a comparative analysis of their treatment of time productive. Both novels radically limit the amount of narrated time—one day in *Mrs. Dalloway*, ten evenings in *The Evenings*—and both make that limitation visible as a structuring principle. This formal restriction is integral to how each novel explores the experience of modern life. By narrowing the temporal frame, Woolf and Reve intensify the reader's awareness of time: it becomes something that presses upon the characters, rather than a transparent background against which events simply occur. These are not merely stories in which time happens to be restricted; they are texts that foreground temporal limitation as an aesthetic choice.

² Erica van Boven & Gillis Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek*, p. 269

³ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 15

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's confinement of the narrative to a single June day is inseparable from her modernist project. The compression of time allows for an intensified exploration of consciousness, allowing moments to expand inward even as clock time advances inexorably. Woolf's working title, *The Hours*, makes explicit that the novel's subject is not merely Clarissa Dalloway's preparations for a party, but the experience of living through time in a modern city structured by bells and schedules.

The Evenings adopts a similarly restrictive temporal framework, but in service of creating a different kind of meaning. Reve's novel is organized around the final ten days of 1946, each chapter marking another evening that brings the narrative closer to the arbitrary yet symbolically charged boundary of the New Year. This countdown structure makes time oppressive rather than expansive: instead of opening moments outward into memory and association, it emphasizes repetition, stagnation, and loss. Time in *The Evenings* is not something to be inhabited creatively, but something to be measured and endured. The rigid chronology and relentless enumeration of hours and minutes turn temporality itself into a source of anxiety.

Taken together, these novels offer two contrasting yet structurally comparable responses to modern temporality. Both restrict narrative time, both insist on its visibility, and both explore what it means to live under the pressure of passing time. Their differences in tone and form only sharpen their compatibility as research subjects: precisely because Woolf and Reve approach time from opposing aesthetic positions, reading them together clarifies how, as we will see, different usages of temporality can shape literary form and generate meaning.

Moreover, both novels are situated at historically charged moments. *Mrs. Dalloway* is set in London several years after the First World War, a conflict that has irreversibly altered both individual lives and the social fabric of British society. The war's aftermath is present everywhere in the novel, from Septimus Smith's shell shock to Clarissa Dalloway's awareness of mortality and aging. *The Evenings*, likewise, takes place shortly after the Second World War, in a society that is materially and psychologically exhausted. Although the war is rarely discussed directly, its presence is felt in the pervasive atmosphere of emptiness, anxiety, and emotional paralysis. In both cases, time is not only a personal or narrative concern, but a historical one: these are societies struggling to situate themselves after catastrophe, to live on in a time that feels profoundly altered.

The central question of this thesis, then, is how *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* employ time to generate meaning. How is the passage of time represented? How do characters become aware of time, and how does that awareness shape their consciousness and behavior? How does narrative tempo—speeding up, slowing down—affect the reader's experience? And how do these formal manipulations of time relate to broader historical conditions of modernity, such as the rise of standardized clock time, urbanization, and the aftermath of war?

By providing answers to these questions, this thesis aims to show how different literary strategies can articulate distinct experiences of modern temporality. Woolf's modernism seeks, at least in part, to reclaim intensity and connection within the constraints of clock time, allowing moments to open outward into memory and association. Reve's postwar realism, by contrast, presents a world in which such expansion seems impossible, and where time has become a relentless mechanism of loss. Both responses are shaped by their historical contexts, but also by formal choices that structure how time is perceived and felt by the reader.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 focuses on time awareness: how characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* become aware of time, and how that awareness shapes their experience of modern life. Particular attention is paid to external time markers—bells, clocks, watches, and radio signals—and to the ways in which these markers intrude upon or are internalized by consciousness. Chapter 2 examines time structure: the formal organization of narrative time, including chronology, duration, tempo, and teleology. Here, concepts such as acceleration, slowing down, and equivalence between tell-time and told time are used to analyze how Woolf and Reve manipulate narrative rhythm to produce meaning. Chapter 3 turns to seasonal time, exploring how summer in *Mrs. Dalloway* and winter in *The Evenings* function as chronotopes that mediate between formal and historical time, shaping mood, perception, and the experience of duration.

Together, these chapters argue that time is not merely a theme in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings*, but a structuring force that permeates every level of the novels. By making time visible—by insisting on its passage, its measurement, and its effects on consciousness—Woolf and Reve compel the reader to confront the modern condition of living within standardized time. In doing so, they demonstrate literature's unique capacity to explore temporality not as an abstract concept, but as a lived, felt, and often troubling reality. Ultimately, this thesis contends that the meaning generated by *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* emerges (for a large part) from their different ways of staging the pressure of time. Whether through the lyrical expansion of a single June day or the oppressive repetition of ten winter evenings, both novels show that to tell a story is always, inevitably, to tell time—and that in modernity, time itself has become one of the most urgent stories to be told.

Theoretical framework

In the case of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings*, time is not simply a background element against which characters move and speak, but one of the formal principles through which meaning is generated. As has been mentioned, the goal of this thesis will be to answer the question how *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* employ time to generate meaning for their respective stories. The function of this section will be to clarify exactly what is meant here with 'time', and to offer a first glimpse of how Woolf and Reve put it to use.

I have already mentioned in the introduction that an easy way to define a story is as a series of events that happen in a particular order. As Erica van Boven and Gillis Dorleijn put it in their chapter on time in *Literair mechaniek*: 'Time is a fundamental structural category of stories. After all, a story is a series of events that take place over time.'⁴ In order to delineate what concept of time I aim to apply in this thesis, I will make use of their introductory book on literary analysis, especially its chapter that is specifically about time.

Formal time and historical time

In what follows, I sketch a conceptual framework for thinking about 'time' in a double sense. First, as a story-telling device: the ordering of narrative events, the rhythm of a single day, the pressure of bells and clocks, the slowing-down of evening rituals. Second, as the historical and cultural situation the story presupposes: post-WWI London vs. post-WWII Amsterdam; the Enlightenment-to-industrial arc of modernity⁵; the trauma of war; the modern invention of standardized time; the rise of clock-discipline in industrial and urban life, and the consciousness of living within the accelerated temporality of modernity. The first sense of time, *Literair mechaniek* calls 'tijdsaspecten van het verhaal'⁶, or *formal time*⁷, and the second 'historische tijd'⁸, or *historical time*.

Within the category of *formal time*, Van Boven and Dorleijn discern four subcategories. For this thesis, two of these will be most relevant, as these are the aspects of time Woolf and Reve most actively experiment with. These are 'duur' or *duration*, which refers to the relation between the amount of time it takes to tell the story ('verteltijd', or *tell-time*) and the amount of time that passes in the story ('vertelde tijd', or *told time*), and 'tijdsverloop' or *passage of time*, which refers to how the passage of *told time* is represented.

Literair mechaniek further distinguishes three ways in which *duration* can be rendered: *Deckung*, *Raffung*, and *Dehnung*.

- *Deckung* (equivalence) occurs when *tell-time* and *told time* coincide, as in a (fast) dialogue.
- *Raffung* (acceleration) occurs when narrated events take less time to tell than they take to occur.
- *Dehnung* (slowing-down) occurs when the narration takes more time than the events themselves.

⁴ Erica van Boven & Gillis Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek*, p. 269 (translation my own)

⁵ Thomas Vaessens, *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse literatuur*, p. 31

⁶ Erica van Boven & Gillis Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek*, p. 270

⁷ In the rest of the thesis, I will use cursives to emphasize my usage of terminology introduced here

⁸ Erica van Boven & Gillis Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek*, p. 270

These distinctions will help to illuminate how Woolf and Reve manipulate narrative tempo to produce meaning. Having established these conceptual tools, we can now return to the broader distinction between *formal time* and *historical time*.

Both senses are necessary, I think, because Woolf and Reve wrote novels in which the characters' internal experience of time is constantly juxtaposed with the external apparatus of the modern world. It is precisely the tension between these that produces the particular kinds of meaning these novels are after, so argues Thomas Vaessens in his book on modern Dutch literature: 'These internal contradictions, brought to light in the metaphors, the symbols and the stories of modernity, can be studied nowhere better and more penetratingly than in the art form par excellence of metaphors, symbols and stories: [...] literature.'⁹

Modern time

Although modernism is often discussed in terms of stylistic experimentation, Vaessens invites us to also consider modern literature as an ongoing negotiation with the human experience of modernity itself. Modernity, in his account, is inseparable from the transformation of time into a measurable and standardized unit. This, through the invention of the mechanical clock, the introduction of standard time, the spread of factory schedules and railway timetables, and the nineteenth-century prestige of the watch as both technology and status symbol¹⁰. That this is not a neutral technical development but an ideological and cultural reorganization of life is crucial for interpreting the meanings related to the use of time in both Woolf and Reve. The modern subject is no longer just living in time; they are *being timed*.

This is precisely the context in which both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* are situated, albeit on different sides of the Second World War and in different national traditions. In Woolf's London, Big Ben is a literal and symbolic emitter of modern time, sending waves of what Clarissa experiences as 'leaden circles'¹¹ through the city. In Amsterdam, the small clocks of ordinary life—the dial of Frits' watch, the clock above the mantelpiece, the radio signal that calmly states the hour¹²—create a similar sense of being caught inside an externally programmed temporality. As Vaessens also stresses, modern literature functions as a sort of workshop or laboratory, a place where new ways of imagining and contesting this historical condition are formulated and tried out.

Peter Childs' account of modernism sharpens this point by emphasizing the link between aesthetic experimentation and the transformed conditions of modern life. For Childs, modernism is an art of a world that has been reorganized by 'industrial development, mechanisation, urbanisation, secularisation and mass forms of social interaction'¹³. One effect of this reorganization is that time itself becomes newly visible. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see an explosion in mechanisms for measuring and broadcasting time: factory clocks, railway timetables, telegraph signals, public clocktowers, pocket watches. Modernist literature responds by turning explicitly to temporality—looking for ways to

⁹ Thomas Vaessens, *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse literatuur*, p. 37 (translations my own)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

¹² Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, throughout

¹³ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 21

represent the inner, human experience time alongside the homogeneous time of the clock that modern society imposes on us¹⁴.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this tension is visible everywhere. Woolf's working title, *The Hours*, foregrounds the structuring role of the clock in Clarissa's day. The narrative is punctuated by the chimes of Big Ben, functioning both as a shared schedule and as a blunt interruption of private thought¹⁵. Clarissa's inner life does not unfold in neat, even units; it ripples and eddies. Like Childs points out:

So, she [Woolf] may start to describe a character's thoughts when a clock begins striking the hour, report those thoughts for several pages and then return to the character's awareness of the clock finishing striking. In public time only a few seconds have passed, but in the character's mind it may be nearer to several minutes.¹⁶

This is a clear example of Woolf playing with *duration*, and specifically with *Dehnung*: the slowing of the passage of time, in which she takes more time telling what is happening than the time it actually takes to happen. It is the opposite of *Raffung*, the acceleration of time, and distinct from *Deckung*, when *tell-time* and *told time* are equivalent.

Memories of Bourton, of Peter Walsh, of Clarissa's illness, surge here into the present with little regard for chronological order. The external world insists on its own rhythm: 'First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable'¹⁷. Nearly unique about *Mrs. Dalloway* is that *tell-time* and *told time* are almost never the same; internal time and external time are never reconciled.

In *The Evenings*, the same problem appears but in a transformed register. The novel is structured around ten consecutive evenings at the end of December 1946—a countdown to the New Year. Within this frame, however, time is experienced as both too slow and too full. Frits is constantly checking clocks¹⁸. He notes the exact times of waking, meals, errands, as if the only way to make sense of life is to pin it to measurable units. Yet nothing 'happens' in any strong sense. The modernist opposition between clock time and internal time thus produces here not Woolfian moments of intensity but an oppressive awareness of emptiness, or of the absurdity of having to fill time at all.

Lived time and *durée*

To understand this internal side of temporality—the subjective flow of consciousness—Bergson's notion of *durée*¹⁹ is particularly helpful. In *The Creative Mind*, Bergson famously distinguishes between the time of clocks and science, which he sees as spatialized, divisible, and quantitative, and the time of lived experience, which is continuous, indivisible and qualitative²⁰. Real *durée* cannot be cut into identical moments and arranged in a line;

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 17, 185

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 90

¹⁶ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 171

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

¹⁸ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, throughout

¹⁹ Or 'duration'—however, to prevent confusion between this kind of duration and the kind of duration from *Literair mechaniek* we have been talking about, I will employ this Bergsonian term in the original French, like it is often done.

²⁰ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 10

such a line is already a spatial metaphor. *Durée* is more like a melody: it unfolds, and past notes resonate within present ones.

Applied to Woolf, *durée* reveals that *Mrs. Dalloway* is not simply a novel set in one day. Formally, the novel observes classical unity of time. But on the level of consciousness, the text constantly blends present perception with recollection, producing a dense temporal texture where decades inhabit a single moment:

It is half-past eleven, [...] and the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest – like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming downstairs on the stroke of the hour in white. It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if this bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat at some moment of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? Then, as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future.²¹

Septimus' shell shock, too, is rendered less through narration of past events than through a temporal breakdown: hallucinations, intrusions of memory, the collapse of distinctions between then and now. Rather than flashbacks, these intrusions are 'odes to Time':

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him [Septimus]; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang.²²

Clock time becomes the stable surface against which shattered *durée* becomes visible.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, formal time is tightly organized around a single June day moving toward Clarissa's party. *Historical time*—the aftermath of the First World War, shifting class structures, the influenza epidemic (to which Clarissa has fallen victim, apparently²³)—is filtered into the narrative through personal temporalities, e.g. Septimus' war trauma.

In *The Evenings*, *durée* appears in a darker mode. Frits' inner life folds back on itself, circling around obsessions—illness, decay, baldness, minor irritations. These repetitive thoughts create a *durée* that has lost its purpose; time does not develop teleologically, but loops. We can interpret this by connecting it to *historical time*: in post-war Amsterdam, everyone has lost relatives and friends, yet in *The Evenings*, nobody seems to talk about it. The war returns as a temporal disturbance: life continues but without direction. The present

²¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 36

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4

feels emptied out, thick with repetition. The *durée* of post-war subjectivity becomes heavy, stagnant.

In *The Evenings*, the relation between formal and *historical time* is more oblique. The novel's ten evenings are situated at the end of December 1946. Formally, this structure suggests new beginnings, possibly a society attempting to re-enter routine after the rupture of war. But the ending of such a significant unit of time also enhances the relentless worry that the reader inherits from Frits: that time is flowing away, meaninglessly. The formal monotony of the evenings becomes, as we will see, an enactment of historical, post-war nihilism.

Modernist frame

Before proceeding further, it is useful to clarify the interpretive perspective from which this thesis approaches Woolf and Reve. In the aforementioned *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse literatuur*, Vaessens argues that, while historical context is important for understanding literature and its effects, literary reading is always guided by a *frame*: a mindset, a reading hypothesis, a structured way of looking that shapes what one notices and values in a text. Importantly, these frames are transhistorical: they do not correspond to historical periods but to distinct reading orientations. As Vaessens explains: 'We do not reconstruct the history of historical postmodernism, but we examine how the postmodernist frame gives meaning to texts, with those texts originating from different periods of modern literary history.'²⁴ This means that a text does not need to e.g. be historically modernist to be read within a modernist frame. The reader may choose that frame because it foregrounds certain questions, themes, or textual properties.

Crucially for this thesis, the concept of frame allows for an analytical distinction that corresponds closely to the double notion of time developed above. Vaessens distinguishes between two levels of each frame. On the one hand, there is 'poëtica', or *poetics*: a set of assumptions about literature as such, including preferences for certain narrative techniques such as 'stylistic devices, metaphors, symbols, and binary oppositions'²⁵. On the other hand, there is the 'referentiekader', or *socio-cultural reference*: a set of assumptions about the historical and cultural world that literature engages with. 'What does that subject imagine modernity to be?'²⁶

This distinction maps directly onto the two levels at which time is analyzed in this thesis. The first level—time as a formal principle within the primary text—corresponds to Vaessens' poetics. Here, time is approached as a narrative and stylistic device: the manipulation of *duration*, rhythm, repetition, simultaneity, and interruption; the tension between internal and external time; and the formal organization of a single day or a series of evenings. At this level, the analysis focuses on how Woolf and Reve shape temporal experience through literary means.

The second level—time as historical and cultural context—corresponds to the Vaessens' socio-cultural reference. At this level, time is understood as a socially and historically produced phenomenon: the emergence of standardized clock time, the disciplining of daily life through schedules and routines, and the experience of living within

²⁴ Thomas Vaessens, *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse literatuur*, p. 106 (translations my own)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115 (translations my own)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117 (translations my own)

modernity's accelerated and regulated temporality. This level concerns the historical situations presupposed by the novels—post-First World War London contra post-Second World War Amsterdam—and the ways in which these situations inform the meanings generated by their representations of time.

By explicitly linking poetics to formal time and socio-cultural reference to *historical time*, the concept of frame provides theoretical support for the analytical structure of this thesis. Rather than treating narrative temporality and historical temporality as separate domains, the frame makes it possible to understand them as distinct but interacting levels of meaning generation.

Chronotope

In addition to Bergson's distinction between clock time and lived *durée*, this thesis will also make use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the literary *chronotope*. Bakhtin introduces the *chronotope* to describe what he calls the 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships'²⁷ in narrative, emphasizing that time and space in literature are never neutral containers but always meaning-bearing forms. His most frequently cited formulation is the following:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.²⁸

The *chronotope* thus names the way narratives give concrete form to particular experiences of time by anchoring them in specific spatial and material configurations.

For the purposes of this thesis, the *chronotope* will be used as a mediating concept between the formal and historical dimensions of time already outlined. Whereas Bergson's *durée* is primarily concerned with subjective temporal experience, Bakhtin's *chronotope* allows us to analyze how such experiences are embedded in social and cultural structures. It provides us with a theoretical vocabulary for thinking about recurring temporal frameworks—such as the day, the evening, or the season—not merely as measurements of time, but as narrative forms that generate meaning. Seasonal structures can thus be approached as chronotopes: historically sedimented configurations in which natural cycles, cultural rituals, and narrative temporality converge. This will make the chronotope especially useful for analyzing how Woolf and Reve mobilize seasonal time not only to structure their narratives, but to articulate historically specific experiences of modernity.

Summary

Throughout the thesis, I rely on Vaessens to articulate modernity as a multi-dimensional process structured by rationalization and control; on Childs to situate Woolf and Reve in a modernist lineage concerned with subjective time; and on Bergson to ground the distinction

²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin in *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel*, cited in: Nele Bemong et al., *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, p. 3

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4

between clock time and lived *durée*; on Vaessens again to clarify the conceptual distinction in time that is necessary for our analysis; and on Bakhtin's *chronotope* to mediate between formal and historical time. This combination makes it possible to read these novels not only as stories told against the background of time, but as experiments in how time can be rendered meaningful.

1. Time Awareness

1.1 Modern time

Expert on modern Anglophone literature Peter Childs has argued that one aspect of the modern world—which thus preoccupied art around the turn of the twentieth century—was the hustle and bustle of urban society. ‘Technological changes meant that Modernism was an art of a rapidly transforming world of industrial development, mechanisation, urbanisation, secularisation and mass forms of social interaction.’²⁹ One aspect of living in the modern world was a constant and acute awareness of time. In the period between 1890 and the start of the First World War, ‘the clock and watch became useful and necessary instruments in modern societies’³⁰. This development was required by several stimulants, like the advancement of railroad networks, communicative media and the rise of factory work³¹, but also had as a side-effect that every person living in the city was suddenly continually notified of the time of day. After the war, if you yourself did not own a (hugely popular) pocket watch, you would be reminded of the time by those of others, by clocks in people’s homes above the mantelpiece, by church bells and radios.

The novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* can be read within a modernist frame, in the sense articulated by Thomas Vaessens, as literary explorations of this heightened time awareness. Rather than treating modernism as a fixed historical category, this thesis approaches it as a reading frame that foregrounds the tension between measured, external time and lived, subjective experience.

1.2 Time awareness in *Mrs. Dalloway*

The Big Ben, completed in 1843, is the big modern broadcaster of time passing in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel is considered to be an emblematically modernist work; the way Woolf uses the Big Ben to denounce the individual hours that lead up to Clarissa’s party is typical for modernism, as she lets characters be governed by new technologies and the rhythm of a fast-paced urban society. Importantly, time here is spatialised in public space: Big Ben stands outside, in the city, imposing its rhythm from a central point. The bell chimes do not merely indicate the hour; they structure the characters’ attention and anticipation (for Clarissa’s party, for instance). Woolf makes this explicit when Peter Walsh, stepping through the street, hears Big Ben striking and thinks:

Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour.³²

Time here is not neutral information. It enters consciousness as rhythm, as pressure, as insistence. The sound of the clock governs not only action, but thought itself. Importantly, this is not limited to one character. Big Ben’s chimes move through the city, binding together

²⁹ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 21

³⁰ Pierre-Yves Donzé, *The Business of Time*, p. 60

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 60

³² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 35

otherwise disconnected figures in a shared temporal framework. Time awareness in *Mrs. Dalloway* is therefore collective, public, and externally imposed.

Like all modern subjects, the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* are constantly made aware of the time. When Woolf first started writing and composing the book, she used the provisional title of *The hours*, marking the countdown to Clarissa's party even more explicitly. The formal similarity of that title to *The Evenings* is striking, especially when we account that Reve's evenings are a countdown to the end of the year—also a party.

Peter Childs explicitly connects this formal emphasis on clock-time in *Mrs. Dalloway* to the experience of temporal oppression in modern life. He notes that while the novel is 'superficially structured around the divisions of the clock,' these divisions function less as neutral markers than as intrusions of public time into private consciousness.³³ The striking of Big Ben repeatedly interrupts what Childs calls the characters' 'internal mental time'³⁴: the *duration* shaped by memory, association, and preconscious thought. This opposition closely resembles Bergson's distinction between measurable, spatialised time and lived, subjective *durée*.

On the other hand, Childs observes that this public time does not merely divide the novel, but also links its characters. Because the chimes of Big Ben are distributed 'in the air,'³⁵ they connect different places and consciousnesses across the city, allowing the narrative to move between figures who do not otherwise meet. When Clarissa hears the clock strike at the same moment that Septimus and Rezia walk down Harley Street, time becomes the mechanism through which their parallel existences are aligned. Public time thus performs a double function: it interrupts inner *duration*, but it also produces narrative connectivity. Woolf employs time both to create pressure on the characters and to structure the story.

At the same time, Woolf complicates this externally imposed time awareness by constantly counterposing it with interior experience. Clarissa's consciousness moves fluidly between present and past, often without transition. A sound, a sight, or a phrase is enough to transport her back to Bourton, to Peter Walsh, or to Sally Seton. These movements do not obey clock-time. Past and present coexist, overlap, and fold into one another. Woolf's use of stream of consciousness can then be understood as an attempt to capture *durée* itself: the inner flow of time as it is lived, rather than measured. For the reader, this produces a double awareness of time: on the one hand, the steady, public advance of the hours; on the other, the sense that lived time follows a very different logic.

This tension becomes more extreme in the figure of Septimus Smith. Where Clarissa experiences time as interruption, Septimus is overwhelmed by it. His awareness of time is no longer simply heightened, but distorted. The past, especially the war, refuses to remain past; it intrudes violently upon the present. Moments stretch and collapse unstably. When he is just sitting in the park with his wife, he imagines: 'There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!'³⁶ For Septimus, time does not move forward so much as it presses down, paralysing him.

Interestingly, the response of modern society to Septimus's temporal dislocation is to impose even stricter temporal discipline. The doctors who attempt to treat him prescribe

³³ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 171

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 19

routine, regularity, and rest, enforcing clock-time as a supposed cure: 'It was merely a question of rest, said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. [...] Sir William said he never spoke of "madness"; he called it not having a sense of proportion. But her husband [Septimus] did not like doctors.'³⁷ Possibly, Woolf suggests here that modernity responds to abnormal experiences of time not with understanding, but with correction. At the same time, the reader, drawn into Septimus's fractured consciousness, experiences moments of temporal confusion, yet is simultaneously carried forward by the novel's relentless movement toward the evening party. We might say (modern) time does not pause for suffering.

1.3 Time awareness in *The Evenings*

Whereas the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* are made aware of the time mostly by the bell chimes of one sonorous centre, in *The Evenings* the indication of passing time stands out in its multifariousness. Frits is constantly concerned with the time, and keeps track of it through many instruments, including his own watch, the clock above their hearth, his father's radio, and the clock hanging from a bank office he walks by³⁸. Notably, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, time is represented by a single building in public space, yet in *The Evenings* time measurement has penetrated the private space of the home, and even the body, as Frits wears a wristwatch.

An exemplary illustration of this obsession can be found in Chapter III, which consists of just fourteen pages but contains an unusually high number of explicit time designations. This frequency forces the reader to share Frits' vigilance and to experience time as something that is both relentlessly present and strangely empty:

Tuesday at noon [...]

[...] during the three quarters of an hour [...]

'Twenty minutes of my time gone already', he thought [...]

He had been inside for six minutes [...]

He had ten minutes left.

Shortly afterwards, at five thirty [...]

At six o'clock his mother put dinner on the table.

He fell silent and glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to eight.

He looked at his watch, which showed a quarter past eight.

It was, Frits noted, ten minutes to nine.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 69

³⁸ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 99

'It is now twenty minutes to ten,' Frits thought, 'if one subtracts the minutes by which my watch is running fast.'

Which means [Jaap's doctor] can get here no earlier than three thirty. At three o'clock I [Jaap] climb into bed and read something pleasant. At three thirty, when I hear a car door slam, I know what that means.

Looking at his watch he saw that it was nearly ten o'clock [...]

'It is ten past eleven,' said Frits.

Twenty minutes later he fell asleep.

After having walked on a bit [...]

[...] sitting half upright for a few minutes [...]³⁹

Note that chapter III consists of just fourteen pages; clearly, then, Reve is employing the awareness of time with a purpose. The frequency of the designations of time forces the reader to make meaning of it or to wonder about Frits' character. Unlike Clarissa, who is made aware of time by an external authority, Frits enforces this awareness upon himself. Time has been fully internalised: he does not wait for it to announce itself, but actively seeks it out, measuring and correcting it. He measures his days with almost punitive precision, constantly noting how much time has passed, how much remains, and how much has been wasted.

As the only narrator and by far the most important character of *The Evenings*, the novel is ultimately a book about Frits. Frits, though, is an exemplary figure: his problems tell us something about the problems of (modern) humans in general. If we argued along the same line as we would with *Mrs. Dalloway*, we might say that Frits' obsession with time slipping away is a symptom of an archetypically modern illness. That it is an expression or manifestation of his inability to control his life in a time of fast technological and societal change. Interpreting *The Evenings* in this way would be viewing it through the lens of Vaessens' modernist frame.

At the same, however, Frits's fixation on time appears to stem from a more personal, fundamental anxiety than that of the average modern subject: an acute awareness of his own mortality. Throughout the novel, Frits repeatedly dwells on signs of physical decay—baldness, illness, deformity, and death. He speaks fascinatedly of cancer, for instance:

"It is a quite marvellous disease," he continued, "I have read fascinating things about it. It is a parasitic cell, it appears out of nowhere and never stops growing. Right through everything. From one organ to the next. Straight through the intestines. Gruesome, incurable, grand."⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-82

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 69

His many remarks to friends about their receding hairlines⁴¹ can be read as projections of his own fear of bodily deterioration, while his fascination with stories of sickness and grotesque accidents offers a grim form of reassurance. These moments seem to provide temporary relief precisely because they confirm that it is, for now, still someone else who is dying. In this sense, Frits's apparent morbidity is less a fascination with death itself than an anxious attempt to keep death at a distance.

Time, for Frits, is therefore not a neutral measure of passing moments, but the very medium through which decay unfolds. Each wasted minute is not merely lost productivity, but a reminder that life is irreversibly slipping away. His compulsive checking of clocks and watches can thus be understood as an attempt to monitor his own gradual disappearance. Unlike Clarissa, who negotiates the pressure of public time, Frits experiences time as a private countdown toward physical decline and death. The novel itself offers us the best metaphor: 'Far away, in the distance, he [Frits] heard the puffing of a train. "And so our time passes," he thought.⁴² For Frits, time is like being on a train: you are constantly reminded of it progressing, wherever you look, and you cannot get out and take a break whenever you need it.

If we follow this line of thought, Frits's obsessive time awareness is not simply neurotic or habitual, but existential. Time slipping away does not merely structure his days; it continually reasserts his mortality. The internalisation of time measurement—into his home, his daily routine, and even his body itself—mirrors the way death has become internalised in his consciousness. Time is not just something that passes; it is something that eats away at him, minute by minute, bite by bite. Hence the importance for Frits of keeping track of time: if he does not check his watch once every few minutes, time will slip away from him, inconspicuously. Or, unnoticed, like the famous near-last sentence of the novel: "It has been seen, he [Frits] murmured, "it has not gone unnoticed."⁴³ Notably, Frits' wristwatch is running fast⁴⁴: time is quite literally escaping him.

For the reader, this produces a very different temporal experience than the one we will see in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Reve's relentless time-marking⁴⁵ forces the reader into the same vigilance as Frits. Each new time designation confirms that little has changed, that time is passing without progress. Although *The Evenings* also displays the consciousness of its characters, specifically Frits, it does not expand inner *duration* as Woolf's does; instead, it fragments it, repeatedly arresting thought in order to measure time. The effect is not suspense, but exhaustion. Time is felt primarily as loss: as something that slips away, irretrievably. Extra painful to Frits, is that time is passing even though nothing (of any meaning) is happening; a contrast that also seems contradictory to the undertaking of literature itself⁴⁶.

⁴¹ For instance, from p. 75: "You've become even balder," Frits said, "you're getting extremely bald. Are you still massaging it? You told me recently, as I recall, that you massaged your scalp."

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 88

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 317

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73

⁴⁵ As an artwork, *The Evenings* might remind us of the experimental movie *The Clock* (2010), a movie that is itself a clock, as it is a 24-hour long supercut of scenes from other movies and television shows that all indicate the time, be it through a shot of a clock or a mention of the time in the dialogue. This makes it so that, at all times, the time shown in the scene is the actual time of day for the person watching the movie in the cinema.

⁴⁶ That is probably why we only see it in a few other, quite unique novels, like Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* and Albert Cosseray's *Laziness in the Fertile Valley*.

1.4 Conclusion

Above we have discussed just the first examples of how Woolf and Reve use temporality to create meaning. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf uses time awareness to simulate the experience of modernity and to expose the pressure exerted by external temporal structures on inner life. In *The Evenings*, Reve uses it to give shape to a character who has internalised that pressure to such an extent that he no longer needs an external bell to remind him of the passing hours. In this sense, both novels explore the conflict between measured time and lived experience. The goal of this thesis will be to demonstrate that both authors constantly employ temporality for this purpose—and that the way time is organised and structured further intensifies its effects on the reader.

2 Time Structure

2.1 Organisatory time

Where Chapter 1 focused on time-awareness, this chapter turns to time structure: the formal organisation of narrative time. It examines how Woolf and Reve structure chronology, tempo, *duration*, and teleology to shape the reader's experience of time.

Again, approaching both novels through a modernist frame allows us to analyse these structures without treating modernism as a rigid historical classification.

2.2 Time structure in *Mrs. Dalloway*

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, time seems to flow, like a flux. Only the bells of Big Ben break up the time, in artificial segments: without them, the spring day leading up to Clarissa's party would feel like one continuous stream.

Important, first of all, is that while time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is experienced as flux rather than as stuttered or halted, its overall time structure is nevertheless teleological, much like that of *The Evenings*. Woolf's novel does not count down towards the end of a year, but towards a clearly defined narrative telos: Clarissa's party. From the very first page, the day is oriented toward this future event—'Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself'⁴⁷—and throughout the novel, clocks, preparations, and movements through the city all implicitly or explicitly anticipate the evening gathering.

Unlike *The Evenings*, however, this teleology does not intensify a fear of time running out. Instead, the party signifies renewal and affirmation for Clarissa. On the morning of the party, she reflects that she has '[...] just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August!'—a formulation that frames the present not as a dwindling remainder, but as the threshold of future possibility. Even at the party itself, Clarissa seems to find hope in her appreciation of life's small joys: 'It was so extraordinarily nice of them to have come!' The novel's teleological movement thus culminates not in exhaustion or nihilism, but in a fragile yet genuine sense of continuity and beginning.

"I had meant to have dancing," said Clarissa. For the young people could not talk. And why should they? Shout, embrace, swing, be up at dawn; carry sugar to ponies; kiss and caress the snouts of adorable chows; and then all tingling and streaming, plunge and swim.⁴⁸

Where *The Evenings* counts down to more of nothing, *Mrs. Dalloway* counts down to more of everything. The emphasis on youth in the party scene reinforces this structure. Clarissa's attention to the 'young people' who 'shout, embrace, swing'⁴⁹, does not imply a return to an earlier state, but rather foregrounds continuity across generations within lived time. Youth here figures as an orientation toward future possibility embedded within the present moment, not as a resetting of time itself. In terms of the analytical frame developed in this chapter, this

⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 3

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125

effect is better understood through Woolf's privileging of *durée* over homogeneous clock time: the party condenses individual temporal experiences into a shared present. We can therefore say that *Mrs. Dalloway* reconfigures teleological narrative time so that its endpoint affirms continuation and renewal, much similar to the 'cyclical time'⁵⁰ Childs attributes to modernist novels, a strategy that meaningfully differentiates it from *The Evenings*.

There are many stylistic aspects of *Mrs. Dalloway* that contribute to the flux-effect described above. One that soon comes to mind in the context of Virginia Woolf is stream of consciousness. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a prime stage for the kind of stream of consciousness Woolf is famous for: that of disjointed, associative inner monologue. An example from the thoughts of Clarissa herself:

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.⁵¹

It is easy to see how this kind of writing contributes to the experience of time as flux in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Rather than in traditional inner monologue, wherein thoughts develop from one to the next discreetly, in Woolf's stream of consciousness thoughts flow into each other near seamlessly, thus generating a sense of time that is fluid. Like a stream.

Actually, there is another technique that Woolf employs which we might also describe as a form of stream of consciousness. In this technique, consciousness does not stream inside a character's mind, from one thought or feeling to the other, but rather from one character's mind to another's. Importantly, this type of stream of consciousness flows just as seamlessly as the first. In this way, it similarly reinforces the reader's experience of time as flux, and is therefore worth highlighting. Here follows an example from *Mrs. Dalloway* which displays this:

That she did not care more about it—for instance for her clothes—sometimes worried Clarissa, but perhaps it was as well with all those puppies and guinea pigs about having distemper, and it gave her a charm. And now there was this odd friendship with Miss Kilman. Well, thought Clarissa about three o'clock in the morning, reading Baron Marbot for she could not sleep, it proves she has a heart.

Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top. The impetuous creature—a pirate—started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself (...). And did Elizabeth give one thought to poor Miss Kilman, who loved her without jealousy, to whom she had been a fawn in the open, a moon in a glade? She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was delicious.⁵²

Another effect of Woolf's stream of consciousness, is that it slows down the tempo of the story: it actually takes for her longer to tell all of the thoughts that come up in her characters' heads, than it would take for them to have them. In other words, she is using *Dehnung*, wherein *told time* is shorter than *tell-time*. According to Van Boven and Dorleijn, '*Dehnung* in

⁵⁰ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 59

⁵¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 96

pure form is even less common than *Deckung*⁵³; yet in *Mrs. Dalloway*, with thoughts streaming from one character to the other for page on page, and these thoughts slowing down all the time, it dominates the tempo of the book.

The fact that the tempo in *Mrs. Dalloway* is much lower than it is in *The Evenings*, is required by the overarching time structures of these respective novels: in terms of word count, their durations are comparable in size. However, when we speak of *told time*, they are very different. After all, *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place in one day, about the time it might take the average reader to read it; and *The Evenings* takes place in ten, including nights full of dreams. Obviously, then, Woolf employs much more *Dehnung* than Reve.

One more time structure-related way in which *Mrs. Dalloway* diverges from *The Evenings*, is the way in which it treats the *durée* of consciousness. I had already touched in the previous chapter on Woolf's technique of stream of consciousness being an illustration of Bergson's conception of subjective time as *durée*. However, this is not the only way she represents the heterogeneity of the modern subject's private experience of time: she also employs flashbacks to have her characters travel back in time, mentally. Septimus' intrusive relivings of his traumatic experiences in the war are the prime example that I already touched on, but Clarissa and Peter Walsh, too, take many moments to think of times gone by:

He had reached his hotel. He crossed the hall, with its mounds of reddish chairs and sofas, its spike-leaved, withered-looking plant. He got his key off the hook. The young lady handed him some letters. He went upstairs—he saw her [Clarissa] most often at Bourton, in the late summer, when he stayed there for a week, or fortnight even, as people did in those days. First on top of some hill there she would stand, hands clapping to her hair, her cloak blowing out, pointing, crying to them—she saw the Severn beneath.⁵⁴

We see here that the stream of consciousness of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s characters not only flow from one thought to the other, or even from one character to the other, but also from one time to the other. Deviating like this from its linear time structure is just another way in which *Mrs. Dalloway* distinguishes itself from *The Evenings*, where everything is told chronologically.

So far, it was already established that there is a clear interaction between Woolf's novel's *awareness* of time, and its typically modernist portrayal of the modern subject. Big Ben's striking of the hours corresponds with modern technology like wristwatches which make the modern subject acutely aware of time. At the same time, Woolf's time structure resists this external discipline by foregrounding lived *duration* over measurable units. In this sense, the novel can be read as enacting precisely the conflict Bergson describes, between homogeneous public time (the bells of Big Ben) and heterogeneous private experience (the inner lives and streams of consciousnesses of Woolf's characters). Whereas in *Mrs. Dalloway* the Bergsonian conflict is playing out in real time, with Big Ben and the characters in the story competing for prominence, in *The Evenings*, it seems the battle is already over and scientific time has won over lived time, as clocks have penetrated Frits' most private spaces. We might say it took just 22 years and one more World War for Bergson's worries about modernity to come true.

⁵³ Erica van Boven & Gilles Dorleijn, *Literair mechaniek*, p. 281

⁵⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 109

Going back to the tension between clock time and *durée* in *Mrs. Dalloways*: this tension is further exacerbated by the time frame inside which the events of *Mrs. Dalloway* take place. Whereas 10 evenings is already much shorter of a time period than that of most novels, a single June day is really exceptionally short; your time structure cannot get much more fast-flowing (and so, modernist) than that.

2.3 Time structure in *The Evenings*

Barring *Genesis*, it might be hard to find a book with a time structure more explicitly chronological and teleological than that of *The Evenings*. Its title refers to its structure of ten chapters that each deal with one of the last ten days (and especially evenings) of 1946. The result of this is that temporality in *The Evenings* is both rigorous and prominent: every chapter describes one December day; and every chapter begins with Frits waking up, denoting the beginning of another day. This further adds to the acute awareness of time the reader already experiences through Frits' compulsive awareness of it.

Time in *The Evenings* is evidently chronological; the teleological nature of its countdown structure, it has in common with *Mrs. Dalloway*. Whereas Woolf counts down the hours, Reve counts down the days towards the end of December, and so the end of the year 1946. That the end of *The Evenings* is also the end of a bigger unit of time than an evening—a year—becomes significant when we remember what the novel is about.

In the previous chapter, we established that Frits' preoccupation with time is really, deep-down, fear. Of death, of time wasted. That explains his obsession with illness, baldness, and decay in general. If time is the only thing between Frits and death, it is not strange that the days of *The Evenings* ruthlessly count down to the end of a whole year. While the average person experiences roughly 27.000 days in their life, that equates to only about 74 years—and that is in 2025, not 1946. In *The Evenings*, not only Frits' seconds, minutes, hours and days are flowing by him 'unnoticed'⁵⁵, but also one of the 70 or so years he has until he dies. Like he mutters near the end of the novel: "Hours, days, months, years," he repeated to himself, "hours, days, months, years."⁵⁶

Furthermore, the novel explicitly counting down towards something, suggests that there is a 'something' to count down to: a countdown implies that there will be a significant event leading up to it. This is a meaningful contrast to what actually happens in the book, which is, of course, nothing. We join Frits on his monotonous and pointless trips through the city, listen to his conversations that are all about pretty much the same things, and fall asleep with him to wake up the next day and find out nothing has changed. Even in the last chapter, where Frits at least realizes he is alive, the drinks with which they celebrate New Year's are again as boring and disappointing as the rest of his life.

The 'deep sleep'⁵⁷ Frits falls into at the very end of the story is a metaphor ambiguous enough to have manifold interpretations: it could be a metaphor for his escape from this tired, monotonous life, and the beginning of a new one in which things actually happen. On the other hand, it could also imply the continuation of the same, the circularity of time, as so far, every chapter has ended with Frits falling asleep, and every new chapter has started with him waking up to boredom and fretted time-watching. Importantly, whatever meaning we take the metaphor to render, falling asleep is not a solution to Frits' existential

⁵⁵ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 317

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317

crisis. Every night slept is one closer to death, that much is certain, and so far, every time Frits has fallen asleep, he has had nightmares about dying in horrible ways. The novel's rigid and teleological time structure thus serves to illustrate, and indeed intensify, this fear. Or, to put it differently, it is precisely through its handling of time that *The Evenings* generates meaning (e.g. Frits' obsession of time is an expression of his fear of death).

Both novels use time to create meaning in different ways. One way in which they do this, is in how they let us readers experience time. As has been pointed out, in *The Evenings*, time seems stuttered: the story is constantly halted, to have Frits look at the time and realize not much time has passed since the last time he checked, yet at the same time it feels to him like it is slipping away.

This paradox—time as simultaneously stagnant and vanishing—closely aligns with Bergson's distinction between measurable time and lived *duration*. Frits' compulsive time-checking exemplifies the spatialized conception of time Bergson warns us about. Frits measures endlessly, yet never *lives* time as a meaningful flow. When time is reduced to a series of countable instants, it becomes something that can be lost or squandered. Frits' fear of 'valuable time, time irretrievable'⁵⁸ slipping away gains its force precisely because time is conceived as a finite resource rather than a lived continuity.

Bergson's claim that scientific time ignores the subjective experience of consciousness is unheimisch-ly illustrated here: Frits waits constantly, yet nothing arrives. Frits' consciousness no longer exists in *durée*, but in society's measured time.

Contrary to *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Evenings* barely ever makes use of *Dehnung*. We see lots of *Deckung*, as dialogues are written down in a matter-of-factly mode that is almost never interrupted with a character's subjective thoughts. We can see an example of this in below conversation between Frits and Viktor:

"Exaggeration or no," said Frits, "the truth will out. You know, Viktor, are you able to forget things? Do you remember that weird business of mine, that very weird business back then? You do still remember that, or don't you?" "Yes," said Viktor, "I still remember." "Good," Frits said, "but still, you've forgotten it completely. You have forgotten, haven't you? You don't remember any more. Even if you wanted to, you couldn't remember it any more." "Absolutely," said Viktor.⁵⁹

Raffung, too, is common in *The Evenings*. It is actually exceptionally clear-cut when it happens in the story, because Frits reminds us all the time when time is passing quicker than he (and maybe we) would like: 'Picking it up in one hand he saw on the bottom that the price was nine and a half guilders. The metal was covered with spots. "Twenty minutes of my time gone already," he thought, and left the shop quickly.'⁶⁰ Reading this passage about Frits shopping should not take twenty minutes, yet in the story, twenty minutes pass. *Told time*, then, is longer than *tell-time*.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that time structure is not merely a formal backdrop in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings*, but a central means through which both novels generate meaning.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 15

⁵⁹ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 170

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 60

Although both narratives are teleological, counting down towards a clearly defined endpoint, the significance of that telos differs radically. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the movement towards Clarissa's party organises time without emptying it of possibility: the novel's one-day structure, its pervasive *Dehnung*, and its flowing streams of consciousness create an experience of time as lived *duration* rather than as loss. Woolf's formal techniques slow narrative tempo, allow consciousness to move freely across memories and perspectives, and thus resist the dominance of homogeneous, measurable time symbolised by Big Ben. The result is a tension between public clock time and private *durée* that remains unresolved, but productive, sustaining a sense of renewal.

In *The Evenings*, by contrast, time structure functions as a mechanism of entrapment. Reve's rigidly chronological, day-by-day countdown toward the end of the year intensifies Frits' fear of death and wasted life. The prevalence of *Deckung* and *Raffung*, the near absence of subjective temporal expansion, and the relentless marking of time all reinforce a conception of time as a finite, diminishing resource. Here, Bergson's fear of spatialised, scientific time appears to have been realised: lived *duration* has been almost entirely replaced by measurement. Where *Mrs. Dalloway* uses time to open experience outward, *The Evenings* uses it to close experience in on itself. In this way, the novels' divergent time structures do not just reflect differing relationships to modernity, but also determine the existential meanings their narratives convey.

3 Seasonal Time

3.1 Seasons as temporal schemas

In the previous chapters, time emerged in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* not as a neutral container in which events occur, but as a formal principle through which those events become meaningful. The interpretive framework for this thesis has therefore treated time in a double sense: as *formal time* and as *historical time*, and it has relied especially on *duration* (the relation between *tell-time* and *told time*), *passage of time* (how the passage of *told time* is represented), and the three narrative-tempo operations *Deckung*, *Raffung*, and *Dehnung*.

This chapter adds a third layer to that analysis: seasonality. The season matters because it lies precisely on the hinge between the two senses of time the thesis has distinguished. On the one hand, it belongs to the *historical time* of the novels. Woolf's 'middle of June'⁶¹ London is not simply meteorological: it presupposes an atmosphere of summer life (open parks, crowds, light evenings, an intensified social calendar) that is historically situated in a post-First World War modern metropolis. Reve's late-December Amsterdam likewise presupposes a historically specific post-Second World War severity, a winter city of which the cold darkness is inseparable from material scarcity and the post-war atmosphere. On the other hand, seasonality also intervenes in *formal time* by shaping *passage of time* and *duration*: winter invites repetition and the sense that time thickens; summer invites dilations and contractions of attention and quick shifts of consciousness. In this section, we will come to see that in both novels, seasonality is a way of staging the tension between external, standardized time (bells, clocks, radio time signals) and lived *duration* (the felt time of thinking)—a tension that is central to modernity as these novels understand it.

The seasonal frameworks that structure *The Evenings* and *Mrs. Dalloway* can be productively understood through Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*. Rather than treating the season as a mere backdrop or atmospheric detail, the *chronotope* makes it possible to see how seasonal time functions as a concrete narrative form. Seasons organize not only weather and daylight, but also e.g. bodily habits, social routines, and expectations of change or stasis. As such, they provide a framework with which we can connect time and space.

The seasonal year is one of the oldest cultural schemata for organizing time: it belongs to a world in which time is registered through environmental change rather than through abstract measurement. You do not look at the clock to know what season it is; you live and breathe it. But in modernity this schema no longer governs social life in the same way. Standardized clock-time has put lived time into a grid that is increasingly independent of natural cycles. It is precisely this shift that makes seasonality interesting for a thesis on modern time: the seasons are still there, still experienced bodily and affectively, but they are no longer the primary 'clock'. Instead, they become a kind of counter-rhythm: a qualitative time that is in tension with quantitative time.

This is visible in both novels through the way seasonal cues coexist with, and are often overshadowed by, mechanical time markers. Woolf's London is punctuated by Big Ben, the famous emitter of shared public time in the novel: its strokes cut through private consciousness and reorganize the city and the narrative. Yet the experience of June—the

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

light, air, heat, flowers—does not disappear under the bell; rather, Woolf stages a constant negotiation between the felt summer day and the abstract hour.

Reve's Amsterdam similarly contains clocks, watches, and radio announcements of the hour. But here winter does not provide a lyrical counterweight; instead, winter amplifies the sense that time has become a monotonous apparatus. December is not 'seasonal renewal'; it is the calendar's dead-end, and it makes visible the emptiness of standardized counting.

This chapter therefore treats seasonality and the *chronotope* not as an interpretive add-on (a symbolic layer) but as a formal regime. The guiding question here is: how do winter and summer shape the novels' manipulation of *duration* and *passage of time*, and how do they mediate between *formal time* and *historical time*?

3.2 Winter in *The Evenings*

The Evenings announces its winter regime immediately. The novel opens 'in the early morning hours of the twenty-second of December 1946'⁶², when Frits wakes up in darkness and cold. The emphasis is not merely informational. December 22 situates the story at the dying end of the year, near the winter solstice, when daylight is minimal. Reve ensures that the physical environment of cold and dark is not a neutral setting but a sort of pressure. Frits sees 'the windowpanes covered in flowers of frost,'⁶³ and the bedroom's cold is experienced as an intrusive presence rather than a descriptive detail. In this way, winter enters the novel as a sensory condition that immediately influences temporality: it produces a world in which time feels heavy, slow, and enclosed. Seasonal time and space are connected in the *chronotope* of winter.

At the level of *passage of time*, winter in *The Evenings* is linked to slowness and repetition. The novel's overall structure—a sequence of ten chapters, each covering one day and evening from December 22 to December 31—already suggests a rhythm that is both linear (counting down to New Year) and cyclic (each evening repeats similar routines). The narrative form itself is wintery: the dominance of darkness and evening means that time is experienced primarily as an approach to night, not as a flourishing of day. If Woolf's working title *The Hours* foregrounds the public clock's structuring of the day, Reve's title foregrounds a darker, narrower temporal unit: not even a day, but the evening.

The crucial narratological effect is *Dehnung*: the stretching of narrated time through the meticulous rendering of banal routines. *Dehnung* is not merely an authorial technique here; it becomes an existential condition. Frits repeatedly observes how 'valuable time, time irretrievable'⁶⁴ seems to leak away in idleness, and the novel's slow accumulation of minor events makes the reader share that sensation. I had argued earlier that time in *The Evenings* functions as an enactment of post-war nihilism; winter strengthens that enactment by turning the world into an environment where everything 'freezes', so to say, except the clock.

The opening sequence shows this clearly. Frits wakes early, looks at his watch, sleeps again, wakes again; the narration lingers on the incremental shifts of minutes—'a quarter to six,' 'twenty minutes past six,' 'ten to seven,' 'seven thirty-five'⁶⁵—as if the clock

⁶² Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 7

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, throughout

were the only thing capable of movement. The dream sequence itself intensifies this: the dream repeats four times, each time returning to the coffin and the dead hand, as if the mind too is trapped in a winter loop. The dream's content (death, decay, rot) is obviously thematically wintery, but more important is its temporal form: repetition without progression. Each re-entry into the living room feels like an attempt to move forward that collapses back into the same scene. Winter here is not merely the season of death; it is the season of temporal standstill.

The final days of December in post-war Amsterdam form a temporal-spatial configuration characterized by darkness, cold, and enclosure. Evenings recur with mechanical regularity, yet without progression. This *chronotope* does not open time but compresses it; rather than enabling expansion of consciousness, it produces repetition and stasis. The season here actively shapes how time is lived and perceived, reinforcing Frits' sense of exhaustion and meaninglessness.

This non-development becomes a principle of social interaction as well. The family breakfast scenes, which recur with only minor variation, are a prime example of wintery time at the level of *Deckung* (equivalence) and *Dehnung* (slowing down). On the one hand, the dialogue itself often approximates *Deckung*: conversations unfold in real-time, with short exchanges, awkward silences, and trivial remarks about weather or keys. On the other hand, these scenes generate *Dehnung* because the narration thickens them through Frits' obsessive internal commentary: he watches his father chew, counts warts on the back of his neck, registers the sound of tea slurping, and interprets sighs as moral failures. The result is that a short breakfast expands into a long, oppressive stretch of narrated time.

It is here that winter's relation to emotion becomes crucial. Cold in *The Evenings* is not just meteorological; it is affective. The most characteristic feature of Frits' social world is emotional disconnection: conversation rarely becomes intimate, sympathy rarely becomes warmth, and interpersonal contact is constantly interrupted by mockery, bodily disgust, or cynical observation. Winter provides the sensory analogue for this. The cold outside is mirrored by a coldness inside, but not as a simple metaphor. Rather, the novel uses cold to establish a tension: in winter, bodies withdraw, rooms close, breath is visible, comfort depends on small domestic heat sources. But where this should create a mood of coziness, emotional warmth is nowhere to be seen.

This becomes especially clear in the novel's treatment of winter holidays. Christmas and New Year are culturally loaded as times of communal warmth, family intimacy, and renewal. But in *The Evenings* these rituals become empty forms, precisely because winter is not allowed to function as a cyclical promise. The days are marked, but they do not transform: Frits' life really never changes (during the story). The holiday structure therefore intensifies the tension between counted time and *durée*: the calendar says 'special day', but lived experience says 'another evening'. The winter regime exposes the mechanical nature of standardized time: one goes through the motions because the schedule demands it, not because it generates meaning.

The New Year's Eve sequence makes this explicit. Frits walks through the city at night, sees 'bengal fire'⁶⁶ flare briefly, talks to boys about 'cold fire'⁶⁷, and then feels the anticlimax: 'There is nothing going on tonight, [...] it was only a bit of noise. In London everyone rushes out into the streets. In Moscow they fire cannons and set off huge fireworks

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 311

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 312

over the whole city.⁶⁸ The line matters not because it is about fireworks, but because it reveals how the end-of-year ritual fails to produce the expected emotional effect. New Year should feel like a transition, from a before to an after, like it does in Moscow, and Clarissa Dalloway's London. But for Frits it is experienced as stasis with a bit of minor noise.

What the novel thereby stages is a paradox of modern temporality: the calendar insists on linear progression (the year ends, the next begins), but lived *duration* does not necessarily follow. The New Year is, in abstract time, a major boundary; in lived time, it may be nothing at all. This is precisely the kind of tension that the thesis' framework is designed to make legible. Winter amplifies it because winter, as experienced here, already feels like a suspension of becoming. If summer tends to make time feel as though it is flowing (days full, evenings long, social life active), winter in *The Evenings* makes time feel like an accumulation of identical units, of evenings spent in the same, stale way.

At the level of *historical time*, this winter suspension is inseparable from postwar Europe. The novel takes place after the war, but the war is not narratively processed through explicit political discussion. Instead, it appears as an absence and a residue: a flatness of atmosphere, a scarcity of meaning, an exhaustion that settles into domestic life. Winter becomes the naturalized form of that historical residue. It is as if the season provides the appropriate sensory frame for a society that has survived catastrophe but cannot yet metabolize it into new meaning. The cold is not simply 'cold'; it is a world in which vitality is suspect, where the future does not appear as promise but as continuation of the same. In Bakhtinian terms, the chronotope here has lost its forward pull; it no longer organizes action toward a meaningful future. Like George Perec wrote, recalling his years as a child during the Second World War in France: 'There was no past, and for very many years there was no future either; things simply went on.'⁶⁹

And yet, this is not the whole story, and a purely nihilistic reading would miss a second symbolic function of winter: endurance. Winter does not only freeze; it also tests persistence. This is where Reve's repeated rituals—walks, cigarettes, radio listening, the obsessive inventorying of bodily defects—take on a more complex meaning. They are at once symptoms of paralysis and mechanisms of survival. The very monotony that produces *Dehnung* also produces a kind of structure: it gives Frits a way of getting through time. The novel's famous ending crystallizes this. After the year has passed, Frits whispers, 'Everything is finished [...] the year is no more [...] I am alive.'⁷⁰ The line is not triumphal; it is almost liturgical. But it reveals that in a winter regime, meaning may collapse, yet persistence remains.

3.3 Summer in *Mrs. Dalloway*

If *The Evenings* is wintery stagnation, *Mrs. Dalloway* is summerly fluctuation. Woolf's novel is set in 'the middle of June'⁷¹, and the repeated insistence on June is not merely atmospheric: it establishes a *chronotope* of warmth, light and air. Summer is, as we will see here, the condition that makes Woolf's modernist time-writing possible: a day in which the external world is alive with movement and sound, and in which inner life is constantly stimulated into association.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 313

⁶⁹ George Perec, *W or the Memory of Childhood*, p. 69

⁷⁰ Gerard Reve, *The Evenings*, p. 317

⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

June in *Mrs. Dalloway* functions as a specific *chronotope* of openness, circulation, and heightened sensory receptivity. The long daylight hours, the warmth of the air, and the liveliness of urban space all contribute to a temporal-spatial configuration in which movement—both physical and mental—is encouraged. Clarissa’s walks through London, her receptivity to sounds, colors, and encounters, and the fluid movement of consciousness from character to character and between past and present are enabled by this seasonal *chronotope*. The season thus thickens time, making it experientially dense rather than merely sequential.

From the opening, June is presented as a kind of gift of vitality: ‘[...] what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge!’⁷² The prose here already performs a temporal effect. Woolf’s sentences mimic the quickness of sensation. This is not the slow, repetitive stasis of *Reve*; it is a rhythm of quick impressions and associations. In narratological terms, Woolf’s summer day allows constant shifts between *Dehnung* and *Deckung*. A moment in public time (crossing a street, hearing a bell) opens into pages of interior association (memories of Bourton, reflections on life), and then returns to the same external moment. In Childs’ words: ‘Woolf can start to describe a character’s thoughts when a clock begins striking the hour, report those thoughts for several pages and then return to the character’s awareness of the clock finishing striking.’⁷³

But summer is not only the medium of expansion: it is also the medium that makes mortality visible. The brightness of June does not simply comfort. It sharpens. Clarissa’s love for ‘this moment of June’⁷⁴ is inseparable from the sense that ‘it was very, very dangerous to live even one day’⁷⁵, even if that day is the 13th of June. That danger is not primarily external, but is the danger of time itself: the knowledge that every vivid moment is already passing. Woolf articulates this explicitly when Clarissa reads: ‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun’⁷⁶, and immediately experiences not merely a social slight but a temporal shock: she ‘feared time itself,’ reading on Lady Bruton’s face ‘the swindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced’⁷⁷. This is a crucial passage for our seasonal reading: the ‘heat o’ the sun’ is here not just summer weather; it becomes the sensory form in which time’s threat is felt.

The permeability of the summer *chronotope* is also visible in Woolf’s recurrent imagery of plants, flowers, sunlight, and growth. The flowers in *Mrs. Dalloway* are frequently marked by fragility: Clarissa’s flower-buying is combined with the awareness that beauty is temporary. Even Rezia’s roses are ‘almost dead already’⁷⁸, as the sun shines through them—summer light reveals decay as much as it reveals life. This corresponds to the novel’s central juxtaposition of Clarissa’s party and Septimus’s suicide: summer sociality and summer brightness exist alongside trauma and death. Clarissa’s party itself can be read as the culminating event of this summer *chronotope*: an evening gathering made possible by light, warmth, and social permeability.

Septimus’s experience is especially revealing for seasonal time, because his consciousness transforms heat into a kind of metaphysical intensity. In one passage, Septimus attributes his altered perception to ‘the heat wave presumably’, which has made

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁷³ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 171

⁷⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 4

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22—a line from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁷⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 67

'the flesh [...] melted off the world', leaving only 'nerve fibres'⁷⁹. This is not just a summer, but a summer as a condition that pushes consciousness into extremes. The world becomes 'macerated'⁸⁰, music becomes visible, the earth thrills beneath him. Such passages enact an intensified lived *duration*: time is no longer measured, but felt as an overwhelming flow of change. In Bergsonian terms, this is *durée* as lived flux rather than spatialized units.

Clarissa's experience of time is less hallucinatory, but it shares the same seasonal logic: summer makes time both abundant and dangerous. She feels 'very young; at the same time unspeakably aged'⁸¹, precisely because June's freshness triggers memory and exposes the distance between then and now. This is again a seasonal mediation between formal time and *historical time*: Clarissa's personal past (Bourton summers) interpenetrates with the present June, and the war's aftermath lurks in the city's soundscape, producing a temporal layering. The season is therefore not just one temporal layer: it is the medium that allows layers to interact.

What sharpens this interaction is Britain's historical position after the First World War: a nation that has survived, and officially won, but at the cost of irreversible social and personal loss. The summer setting acquires a faintly triumphant quality—open streets, crowds, social gatherings, a revived public life—but this vitality no longer feels innocent. The return of summer does not restore pre-war continuity; instead, it exposes the rupture. Life resumes in June, yet it does so under the shared knowledge of death: almost everyone has lost someone. Summer becomes the *chronotope* in which this paradox is lived: a season of light, sociability, and apparent renewal that simultaneously makes loss more visible. In this way, seasonal time connects historical victory with experiential fragility.

Summer also structures the novel's representation of the city. London in June is full of movement: traffic, crowds, parks, sounds, official cars, airplanes. Big Ben's 'leaden circles'⁸² dissolve into the air as a part of this sensory field. The city is therefore not merely a spatial setting: it is a temporal environment in which modern standardized time is constantly broadcast, yet constantly absorbed into lived perception. June's air is described as a 'soft mesh [...] which, as the day wore on, would unwind them'⁸³. That 'unwinding' is both literal (heat changes, morning becomes afternoon) and narratological: Woolf's day unwinds into ever more complex developments of consciousness.

One particularly revealing moment of seasonal temporality appears in Peter Walsh's perception of London's 'very hot night' and the 'heat-wave'⁸⁴. Heat here changes the city's temporal feel: it slows some movements (people sit outside, traffic thins), prolongs the evening, and makes the day feel as if it is 'just beginning'⁸⁵ even at night. The passage explicitly links this to 'the great revolution of Mr. Willett's summer time'⁸⁶, which has 'taken place since Peter Walsh's last visit to England'⁸⁷. This is one of the most precise points at which seasonality mediates between *historical time* and story time. Summer time is a historically instituted change in clock time (daylight saving), a manipulation of measured time

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 49

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 49

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 7

⁸² Ibid., p. 4

⁸³ Ibid., p. 5

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 114

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 114

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 114

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 114

that is justified by seasonal light. Peter finds the prolonged evening 'inspiring'⁸⁸, and the narrative registers how the city refuses the evening's natural fading: 'I fade, she was beginning, I disappear, but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry.'⁸⁹ Here seasonality parallels modernity's refusal of natural rhythms. London forces the evening into 'partnership in her revelry', as if modern life cannot accept the quiet closure of day.

At the level of *duration*, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a constant oscillation between *Dehnung* and sudden accelerations, between the stillness of a moment and the rush of association. Clarissa's mind can be 'shivered'⁹⁰ by a social message, and the narration will linger on that shiver as on a plant shocked by an oar. Then it will accelerate through external action—moving through the city, switching consciousness to another character—, producing a kind of temporal montage. This is part of the modernist technique of being 'plunged' into a shifting mental landscape⁹¹.

3.4 Conclusion

What emerges from this analysis is that seasons in these novels are not decorative metaphors. They are ways to make meaning out of time. Winter in *The Evenings* operates as a regime of frozen *duration*: repetitive evenings, *Dehnung* without intensity, ritual without renewal, a calendar that moves while the subject remains caught in waiting. Summer in *Mrs. Dalloway* operates as a regime of oscillating *duration*: oscillations between public clock-time and private lived time, moments when memory floods the present, heat and light as intensifiers that make both vitality and mortality feel immediate.

In both cases, seasonality mediates between the two senses of time central to this thesis. It belongs to *historical time* as part of the novels' situated modern worlds (postwar London and Amsterdam), and it shapes *formal time* by conditioning narrative tempo, perception, and the representation of passage. Most importantly, seasonal regimes make the modern temporal problem sensible: in the way that summer's heat and winter's cold are felt on the skin, so is the pressure of standardized time felt in the air and in the rhythm of days and evenings. Woolf and Reve therefore use seasons not to symbolize life's cycle in a reassuring way, but to show how modern subjects experience time as either overflow (summer) or arrest (winter)—and how, in both cases, meaning is produced not despite time's passing but through the very texture of living within it.

Taken together, the seasonal *chronotopes* of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* illuminate how Woolf and Reve articulate different modern experiences of time. Woolf's summer *chronotope* aligns with a modernist search for intensity and connection within the pressures of clock time. Reve's winter *chronotope*, by contrast, stages the aftermath of historical rupture as temporal exhaustion. Both novels thus demonstrate Bakhtin's insight that *chronotopes* are used in literature to mediate human experience.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 114

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 114

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22

⁹¹ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, p. 4

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* employ time to generate meaning. Rather than approaching time as a neutral narrative container, the analyses have treated temporality as an active formal principle through which both novels articulate experiences of modern life. By focusing on time awareness, time structure, and seasonal time, the thesis has shown that Woolf and Reve use temporality not simply to organise their narratives, but to shape the reader's experience of consciousness, modernity, and existence itself.

A central methodological choice of this thesis was to distinguish between two senses of time: *formal time* and *historical time*. *formal time* include the ordering and passage of events, narrative duration, and tempo, as described by Van Boven and Dorleijn through concepts such as *Deckung*, *Raffung*, and *Dehnung*. *Historical time*, by contrast, refers to the socio-cultural conditions that shape experience. The analyses have consistently shown that these two levels cannot be separated in either *Mrs. Dalloway* or *The Evenings*. Formal manipulations of narrative time derive their significance from the historical conditions of modernity, while *historical time* becomes tangible and experientially accessible through narrative form.

Time Awareness

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, time awareness is primarily mediated through the presence of public clocks, most notably Big Ben. The striking of the hours structures the day, interrupts private thought, and imposes an external rhythm on the city and its inhabitants. At the same time, Woolf's narrative form persistently resists the dominance of clock time. Through stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse, and frequent shifts between characters, the novel foregrounds lived duration over measurable units. Moments expand to accommodate memories, associations, and emotional resonances that far exceed their allotted seconds. In this way, Woolf stages a continuous tension between public, standardized time and private, subjective experience.

This tension is not merely thematic, but formal. As the analysis of *duration* demonstrated, *Mrs. Dalloway* is dominated by *Dehnung*. Woolf consistently takes more time to narrate what happens in consciousness than the events themselves require in story time. This slowing-down effect produces a reading experience in which time feels fluid and dense rather than segmented and scarce. The reader is invited to inhabit the rhythms of thought rather than to move efficiently from one plot point to the next. Importantly, this does not abolish chronological progression. The novel remains tightly organised around a single day moving toward Clarissa's party. Instead, Woolf allows multiple temporal layers to coexist within that structure, so that past and present continually overlap.

In *The Evenings*, time awareness takes a markedly different form. Frits does not experience time as something that intrudes upon his consciousness from the outside; rather, he actively enforces awareness of time upon himself. Watches, clocks, and radio announcements saturate his daily life, and his constant checking of the time forces the reader into the same vigilant posture. Unlike Clarissa, who is periodically interrupted by time, Frits appears unable to escape it. Time awareness in *The Evenings* is therefore not

collective and public in the way it is in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but private, internalised, and compulsive.

Time Structure

This difference is reinforced at the level of time structure. Whereas *Mrs. Dalloway* relies heavily on *Dehnung*, *The Evenings* is dominated by *Deckung* and *Raffung*. Dialogue unfolds in real time, and long stretches of lived experience are compressed into brief summaries. When *Dehnung* does occur, it does not open up inner life in the way it does in Woolf's novel. Instead, it intensifies irritation, boredom, or disgust. Narrative tempo in *The Evenings* thus mirrors Frits' own experience of time as something that both drags and slips away. Time feels simultaneously stagnant and vanishing, a paradox that recurs throughout the novel.

Both novels are teleological, in the sense that they count down toward a specific endpoint. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this endpoint is Clarissa's party; in *The Evenings*, it is the end of the year. Yet the analyses have shown that teleology functions very differently in each case. Woolf's party gathers disparate temporal strands into a shared present. It does not resolve the tensions of the novel, but it affirms the persistence of life. Clarissa's reflections at the party suggest that meaning can arise from fleeting connections and from the awareness of being alive among others.

In *The Evenings*, the end of the year offers no comparable affirmation. The countdown structure creates an expectation of change or renewal that is repeatedly frustrated. New Year's Eve turns out to be just another disappointing evening, and the transition from one year to the next does not transform Frits' experience in any meaningful way. Here, teleology exposes the emptiness of abstract temporal divisions. The calendar insists on significance, but lived experience does not comply. Meaning is generated not through culmination, but through the stark confrontation with time's indifference.

Seasonal Time

Seasonal time provided a crucial lens through which these differences could be further articulated. By using Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*, the thesis approached winter and summer as concrete temporal-spatial regimes that shape narrative form and experience. Winter in *The Evenings* is associated with darkness, cold, repetition, and enclosure. Days blur into one another, and routines recur with minimal variation. This wintery *chronotope* intensifies the sense of temporal stasis already produced by the novel's structure and tempo. Time passes, but it does not develop.

Importantly, this winter regime is inseparable from the novel's historical context. Post-war Amsterdam is presented as a world in which life continues without clear direction. The war is rarely discussed explicitly, yet its aftermath is felt in the flatness of social interactions and the absence of future-oriented desire. Winter becomes the experiential form of this historical condition. It is not merely cold; it is exhausting.

Summer in *Mrs. Dalloway*, by contrast, enables openness, movement, and temporal layering. June's light and warmth encourage walking, social encounters, and sensory attentiveness. Consciousness is constantly stimulated into association, and the city becomes a space in which different lives and temporalities intersect. Summer allows Woolf to move fluidly between characters and between moments in time, reinforcing the sense that lived experience cannot be contained within clock time alone.

At the same time, summer does not eliminate awareness of mortality. On the contrary, it intensifies it. Clarissa's acute appreciation of life is inseparable from her fear of time and death. The brightness of June makes the passage of time more visible, not less. In this sense, summer functions as a *chronotope* in which vitality and transience coexist. The novel does not deny loss or suffering; instead, it situates them within a temporal field that still allows for connection and meaning.

Time to think

Across all three analytical chapters, a consistent contrast emerges. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, time is experienced as a site of tension between external discipline and inner freedom. That tension remains unresolved, but it is productive. In *The Evenings*, time appears as a closed system in which measurement has largely displaced lived duration. Here, the struggle with time no longer generates new possibilities, but reinforces exhaustion and anxiety. The novels thus articulate different relationships to modern temporality, shaped by their historical moments and formal choices.

It is important, however, not to treat this contrast as a simple opposition between hope and despair. *Mrs. Dalloway* does not offer a solution to the problems of modern time, nor does *The Evenings* merely negate meaning. Both novels acknowledge the pressure and violence of standardized temporality. What differs is how each novel imagines living within that condition. Woolf suggests that meaning may arise intermittently, in moments of shared presence and heightened awareness. Reve suggests that meaning, if it exists at all, lies in endurance and the refusal to disappear entirely.

Ultimately, the analyses have demonstrated that *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Evenings* generate meaning through the specific ways in which they organise, represent, and problematise time. Attention to temporality reveals how deeply formal choices are bound up with historical experience, and how literature can render abstract structures of modern life experientially concrete. Time, in these novels, is neither background nor theme alone. It is a medium through which modern existence is made narratable.

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