Modernist Novel and the Idea of Progress

Tkalčec, Lara

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Završni rad

Studentica: Mentorica:

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Zadar, 2016.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Lara Tkalčec,** ovime izjavljujem da je moj **završni** rad pod naslovom **Modernist Novel and the Idea of Progress: a Reading of Virginia Woolf's Novels *Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts and Orlando: A Biography*** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

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Abstract

This final paper examines V. Woolf's response to the idea of progress on the example of three of her novels: *Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts* and *Orlando: A Biography*. The idea itself was especially intensified by rapid social, technological and scientific inovations that had taken place in modernity. It is inseparable from the concept of time in the first place and when it comes to literary fiction of the period it can be stated that it addresses issues like temporality (temporal ordering of events in both story and its discourse) as well as narrativity in general. Needless to stress, temporality and story telling are closely connected with the concept of history in both historiographic and literary terms. In historical terms it was evident that the First World War called into question any idea of progress as such, and all the three novels selected for this paper were written after the war. Our analysis of V. Woolf's novels leads to a conclusion that Woolf's literary fiction undermines the idea of progress. Her disbelief in the idea of progress is expressed by her insistence on simultaneity and acausality (in *Mrs. Dalloway*), circularity and carnevalization of time (in *Between the Acts*) and a complete atemporality (in *Orlando: A Biography*).

Key Words: Virginia Woolf, modernism, temporality, narrativity, history, Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts, Orlando, First World War, Industrial Revolution, progress

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1. Introduction

This final paper will focus on Virginia Woolf's attitudes towards the notion of progress in three of her novels: *Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts* and *Orlando: A Biography*. As a modernist writer, Woolf in her novels reflected the spirit of modernist era, which was marked by technological, scientifical as well as social progress. Technological advances that emerged during the Second Industrial Revolution completely transformed society. Everything seemed chaotic and moved much more swiftly., the idea of such progress is directly connected to the progress of time and therefore, Woolf, along with her contemporaries, in her literary fiction examined the notion of temporality and narrativity itself. A notion of history, being closely related to the notions of time and narrative progress, has an important role in this context as well. In this final paper, it will be examined how Woolf in each of the novels mentioned above treats and represents narrativity and time progress and what are Woolf's attitudes towars history in both historiographic and literary terms. While doing so, we will rely on works of authors that were concerned by either Woolf's novels or modernist period in general.

2. Temporality, Narrativity and History in Modernist Context

The Second Industrial Revolution at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century brought on many changes in society; more advanced and efficient processes of manufacturing were developed, which then caused rapid urbanization. With the development of trains, railways and the telegraph, the world seemed more connected. Overall, the society seemed completely transformed: living standards improved significantly and Europe experienced an enormous economic growth. However, people soon began to realize that all these changes in society may not be completely positive and may not lead to a better future. These attitudes were further supported by the beginning of the First World War. Marshall Berman in his book, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air,* vividly captures the spirit of the age:

> „There is a mode of vital experience - experience of space and time, of the self and others, […] - that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience 'modernity'. To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all Modernity and modernism mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. “ (Berman 15)

Soon, all these changes in people’s lives began to be reflected in literature and other arts. Life became accelerated and there seemed to be a large disconnection between people, an effect

contrary to the one the technological advancement was supposed to bring. Everything was happening so rapidly that it seemed that the time completely disappeared, as if it was annulled by speed. As a result, works of many writers began to display changes in representation and perception of time progress. Examples of this can be seen in works of many writers, such as James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. In her book, *Theorists of Modernist Novel*, Deborah Parsons calls their style of writing "the new realism" and, according to her, writers of the new realism tend to depict passage of time as it is experienced by characters, that is, how they perceive it in their minds, which, ofcourse, differs from the "standard" realism, in which plots are characterized by linearity and straightforwardness. (Parsons 109) Because of this, in many of modernist novels, the distinction between mind-time and clock-time can be made. Essentially, the main idea behind this is that every individual's experience of time may not be the same and it may not coincide with the time marked on the clock, which, as a result, calls into question the notion of time progress itself. According to Parsons, people started focusing on this idea after the Greenwich meridian was standardized and clocks around the world were synchronized in order to "serve the needs of modern transport and communication systems (the railway, the telegraph)". This way, the passage of time and the way it was perceived was changed in a "very obvious and public way". (Parsons 109) The concept of individuality of time perception showed in a way that the scientific laws are simply universal conventions, which encouraged the writers of that time to experiment with or even reject novelistic conventions, which then changed the way narratives were presented. New narrative techniques emerged, such as stream of consciousness and multiple points-of-view. The novels were now built out of fragments and it was up to the reader to use these fragments and construct a story. There was no causal link between those fragments, meaning that there was no actual progress of the plot. Acausality lead to atemporality, both of which affected the overall coherence of the novels. All of this simply reflected the state of society at that time;

people were baffled by the sudden rapidness of everyday life and it seemed that everything was happening all at once, without any connection between the events.

The notion of time progress is linked with history and therefore, many writers displayed a disbelief in history. Essentially, if there is no causal link between the events, the issue of how to record history emerges. To quote David Harvey:

> "To begin with, modernity can have no respect even for its own past, let alone that of any premodern social order. The transitoriness of things makes it difficult to preserve any sense of historical continuity. If there is any meaning to history, then that meaning has to be discovered and defined from within the maelstrom of change, a maelstrom that affects the terms of discussion as well as whatever it is that is being discussed. Modernity, therefore, not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a neverending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself." (Harvey 11-12)

Therefore, alongside the notion of temporality, history began to have a significant role in modernist novels. The event that brought attention to the issue of history and history writing was The First World War, which "ruptured any remaining continuity with what seemed by comparison to be the confident stability of the past, producing a pervasive sense of historical, social and psychological dislocation." (Parsons 109)

3. The Idea of Progress in Virginia Woolf's Novels

3.1. *Mrs Dalloway*

The plot of *Mrs. Dalloway* is set in June 1923, London; the story begins in the early morning and it ends the next day at 3 o'clock in the morning, which means that less than twenty-four hours pass during the story. The novel offers two different storylines; one involving the story of Clarissa Dalloway and her planning of a party, and the other depicting the struggles of Septimus Warren Smith, who was driven mad by the war, and his wife, who tries to help him. The two plotlines have nothing in common and, as a result, one might feel that they are reading two separate novels. The only thing that connects these stories, however, is the time and place in which they occur. This one day in London serves as a "skeleton" for the novel, that is, its basic structure and, within this structure, Woolf is able to shift freely, not only from Clarissa's story to one of Septimus Warren Smith, but also from events happening in the present to the ones that happened in the past.

The past plays a significant role in the lives of the characters, which is observable in the way Woolf incorporates flashbacks into the plot. Through these flashbacks, the reader is able to find out information about the character's past, but also how that past affected their interpretations of the present. As Robert Humphrey points out, "the time involved in the basic drama which takes place in the minds of these characters covers eighteen years; the place of incident varies from India to Bourton to London to the World War battlefields of France; and about a dozen characters are involved". (Humphrey 100) For instance, throughout the novel, Clarissa constantly muses about her past, thinking about Sally Seton and Peter Walsh. Through her memories we learn about her friendship with Sally and Peter being in love with Clarissa. Of course, other characters' memories are significant as well. Through Walsh, for instance, we discover plenty about Clarissa, Peter's life in India and his love affairs. The narrative voice rarely offers any kind of useful information about the characters' pasts, attitudes, motivations and feelings; they are introduced through introspection of characters and, therefore, all of the information are scattered throughout the novel without being arranged in a meaningful way. The only character, who does not offer any kind of coherent information, is Septimus

Warren Smith. Of his madness, serving in the war and witnessing his friend's death, we learn through his wife, Lucrezia. Smith's incapability to express his thoughts in a coherent manner is, of course, due to his madness and a lack of flashbacks on his part could be a result of him never actually escaping the past. Septimus' visions of his friend Evans, who died in the war, serve as a proof that, in his mind, he still has not left the wartime and is unable to escape it. This is also confirmed by his attitudes towards doctors. For instance, when speaking about doctor Holmes, Smith uses war terminology, as if they were in a battle: "Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won." (MD 76) His thoughts are often interrupted by his wife: "Interrupted again! She was always interrupting." (MD 20), who tries to engage him by pointing at different things in order to make him aware of the present moment.

Although the past plays an important role, the emphasis is still on the present, or rather, on the present *moment*: "In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; […] brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June." (MD 4) In fact, a large portion of the novel seems to be built out of different moments that are not necessarily causally linked: there is no actual progress of the plot, the reader only experiences various moments one after another. Everything that is happening seems to be instantaneous and fragmented. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, Clarissa, after hearing "a little squeak of the hinges" is being immediately transported into the past:

> "What a plunge! […] she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. […]; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?"— was that it?—"I prefer men to cauliflowers"—was that it? (MD 4)

Clarissa's not being able to remember Walsh's exact words proves that her memory is fragmented and incomplete, however, this does not mean that the act of remembering has no powerful effect on her. Clarissa herself seems to be aware of the momentariness of her memories and thus reliving them seems to her like a plunge, a sudden and forceful jump into

her past. Although the novel consists only of small fragments and moments, they still have a great effect on the characters and have the power to change their lives. For instance, at a certain point, when Clarissa is thinking about her husband, Richard, she thinks to herself: "Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment […] when she had failed him." (MD 26) and the moment when Sally kisses her, she describes as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life". (MD 29) Peter Walsh, after visiting her, manages to compress his life in just a few words: "[…] and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work!" (MD 36), which is similar to Clarissa's plunge into her past. The word *scene* is being used quite frequently, as well, which makes the novel seem slightly cinematic. For instance, Clarissa "could remember scene after scene at Bourton" (MD 5) and Walsh remembers the worst moment of his life as "the final scene, the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life". (MD 52) The characters of the novel feel bombarded by these various moments, fragments, scenes and images: "The cold stream of visual impressions failed him now as if the eye were a cup that overflowed and let the rest run down its china walls unrecorded." (MD 135) This overwhelming feeling is not achieved only by the quantity of the images and events, but also by the feeling that it is all happening at once:

> "It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. Theclock began striking. The young man had killed himself [...]" (MD 152)

All of this reveals the lack of coherence as well as acausality between the events in the plot: there is no link between the events and only small fragments are presented in the novel.

Although it was said that the two storylines do not have anything in common, there are some moments at which they meet. At certain points, plotline following one character abruptly

stops and immediately switches to another. For instance, after the explosion of a motor car at the beginning of the novel, the narrative voice unexpectedly switches from Clarissa to Septimus and his wife. Many of these shifts occur right after Big Ben strikes and it seems that the clock serves as the unifying element of the two storylines. Although it seems that the characters belong to different worlds, the striking of Big Ben serves as a reminder that they are, in fact, in the same world. Not only does the clock unify those two plotlines, but it is also a symbol, which brings together two kinds of temporality in the text. Namely, the distinction between internal and external time can be made. The internal time, or mind-time, is expressed through characters' memories and internal interpretations of the current events. This is contrasted with the external time, or clock-time, measured by the clocks, most prominent of which is Big Ben: "Big Ben was beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable." (MD 96) These two contrasting temporalities serve to illustrate the individuality of time perception. For instance, while the already mentioned explosion at the beginning of the novel lasts only thirty seconds (MD 14), its description through point of view of various characters is presented on several pages. Without clocks, it would be quite difficult, or even impossible, to determine the time in which the plot is set. Therefore, the clocks provide a structure, for the characters; for instance, Elizabeth, while taking a walk in the city, wanders: "But what was the time?—where was a clock?" (MD 112) and so it seems that she needs to know the time so that she can determine her location in both time and space; she needs to know the time, so that she can know if it is the time to return home. The striking of the clock seems to provide a sense of serenity, among the surrounding chaos, for Lucrezia as well: "The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself." (MD 123) The clocks do not provide only a structure, but also serve as a reminder that time, despite many references to the past, indeed flows forward, in one direction, and it is "irrevocable".

Paul Crosthwaite in his book, *Trauma, Postmodernism and the Aftermath of World War II,* argues that Woolf tried to "express concern over the dehumanising pressures that seemed increasingly to define the public sphere, but considered a strict separation between public and private existence to be neither possible nor desirable". (Crosthwaite 118) Anna Snaith emphasizes the importance of the terms 'public' and 'private' in reading Woolf's texts, as well. (Snaith 63) The relationship of the two terms is illuminated through Woolf's narrative strategy. She broke away from the traditional forms and disliked Joyce's use of the direct interior monologue technique, as she considered it to be an expression of 'the damned egotistical self'. (qtd. in Crosthwaite 118) Therefore, she employed free indirect speech, which is, according to Snaith, her most frequently used, as well as discussed, narrative method. (Snaith 63) This method is demonstrated when the narrative voice interrupts internal thoughts of the characters and vice versa. For instance, looking at the first two sentences of the novel, it is evident that the first three depict Clarissa and her surroundings from the 'outside': "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would betaken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming." (MD 1), and then the next one expresses Clarissa's thoughts: "And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach. (MD 1) This method grants Woolf fluidity: by changing points of view, she is able to depict character from the outside, as well as from the inside. This is why this method is ideal for the depiction of the public and private realms of life. Internal thoughts, memories and attitudes are a part of the private voice, while the narrative voice belongs to the public sphere. The narrator is anonymous and his function is simply to relate what the characters are feeling and thinking to what is actually happening in the text. Still, Snaith argues that Woolf "in general avoided either an extreme public or an extreme private voice." (Snaith 64): in the novel, the narrative

voice is never omniscient and she grants equal amount of space for both the public and the private voice.

3.2. *Between the Acts*

Much like in *Mrs. Dalloway,* the specific time and space of the plot for his novel are given. Namely, the plot of the novel is set in mid-June in 1939, six weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War in the English countryside and covers the period of about twenty-four hours. The whole novel is centered around historical pageant, depicting various scenes from the history of England, from the country's inception to the present moment. Between each epoch (England in time of Chaucer, Elizabethan age, Age of Reason, Victorian age, etc.) there is a small break in which the audience tends to their own, personal issues, hence the name of the novel. Yet again, Woolf constructs a structure for the novel (in this case, the pageant), which allows her to fluctuate from the present to the past, although in this novel, the past extends much further than characters' memories.

Right from the beginning, it is evident that history plays a significant role in the novel; already on the first page there is a reference to the past, as well as its effects on the present: "From an aeroplane, he said, you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars." (BA 3) The place in history of the characters' families if often brought up, as well: "The Olivers couldn't trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years. But the Swithins could. The Swithins were there before the Conquest" (BA 18) The character that seems to be linked to the history and past the most, however, is Mrs. Swithin; she enjoys reading the book titled *Outline of History,* which inspires many images of the past in her mind:

> "Forced to listen, she had stretched for her favourite reading—an Outline of History and had spent the hours between three and five thinking of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel,

> was all one; populated [...] by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging,slowly writhing, [...] barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably,she thought [...] we descend.” (BA 6)

Not only does she muse about the history of the world, but she contemplates her own past, as well. However, her past, as much as the prehistoric age, seems so distant to her, as it was a completely different world: ”How often her mother had rebuked her in that very room—"but in a very different world”. (BA 6)

Throughout the whole novel, there seems to be a juxtaposition of the two kinds of histories: the history of the whole world (the one represented in Swithin’s book and mind), or at least the whole country (the one represented in the pageant) - the history on a large scale, and the history on the smaller scale: the history of the village and of the families who live there, which is gradually being forgotten:

> ”Driving past, people said [...] to the chauffeur: "Who lives there?"The chauffeur didn't know. The Olivers, who had bought the place something over a century ago, had no connection with the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets; the old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwisted, like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall” (BA 5) .

This can be connected to the issue of the common man and his role in the writing of history, which, according to Spiropoulou, was one of the issues Woolf had dealt with. (Spiropoulou 139) Woolf maintained that “the Great War offered an opportunity for society to finally become aware that the ‘history as it is written’ does not necessarily coincide with the ‘history as it is lived’” and that “the history of the war, is not and never will be written from our point of view, because it is the individuals,‘the people with names’ who ‘proclaim war’ while the ‘anonymous you’, the masses, ‘the jelly of human staff’ passively take the ‘reflection of the

things that individuals do".. (qtd. in Spiropoulou 139-140) In the novel, this attitude is observable in the song the actors sing at the end of the scene: "*Palaces tumble down* (they resumed), *Babylon, Nineveh, Troy … And Caesar's great house ... all fallen they lie ... [...]* .The words died away. Only a few great names—Babylon, Nineveh, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Troy—floated across the open space" (BA 80), meaning that the world only remembers "a few great names", while the rest is forgotten. Besides this, after reading an article in the newspaper about the rape of a girl by a group of soldiers (BA 12), Isa thinks to herself: "That was real [...]" (BA 12) This event keeps appearing in Isa's mind later in the novel, as well, forcing her to recognize it because, after all, it is real and equally worth discussing as the news about dead soldiers that Isa's husband, Giles read about: "Had he not read, in the morning paper, in the train, that sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent?" (BA 27)

Spiropoulou claims that Woolf considered the standard historiography inadequate (Spiropoulou 140) and, therefore, a certain notion of disbelief in history can be observed in the novel. The historical pageant, whose role is to celebrate the country and its history, from the beginning seems more like a parody than the actual attempt of celebrating England: "*"England am I,"*she piped again; and stopped.She had forgotten her lines." (BA 44) Besides this, the play is constantly being interrupted, either by the audience, or by the animals standing nearby: " [...] *Mistress of pinnacles, spires and palaces*—(her arm swept towards the house) *For me Shakespeare sang*—(a cow mooed. A bird twittered) *The throstle, the mavis* (she continued) [...]" (BA 49) The fact that the play occurs in the present and the past is simply constructed from the point of view of the people living in the present moment, arouses the thought that the history is fictional, as well. Miss La Trobe even decides to omit a few decades in her play, as if they are of no historical importance:

> ”The producer [...] craves the indulgence of the audience. Owing to lack of time a scene has been omitted; and she begs the audience to imagine that in the interval Sir Spaniel Lilyliver has contracted an engagement with Flavinda; [...] "We're asked to imagine all that," she said, putting down herg lasses. [...] Colonel Mayhew did not disputethe producer's right to skip two hundred years in less than fifteen minutes.” (BA 81-90)

The characters themselves seem to display a disbelief in history as well: “"The Victorians," Mrs. Swithin mused. "I don't believe" she said with her odd little smile, "that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently." "You don't believe in history," said William.” (BA 99)

Similarly to *Mrs. Dalloway,* the distinction between clock-time and mind-time can be made in *Between the Acts*. However, this time, the distinction is addressed by the narrative voice, already at the beginning of the novel: ”It took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer, to separate Grace herself [...] from the leather-covered grunting monster [...]”. (BA 6) The characters seem to be aware of this phenomenon, as well. For instance, Mrs. Swithin seems to enjoy reconstructing the past in her mind and “increasing the bounds of the moment by flights into past or future”. (BA 6) The clock-time is, of course, yet again measured by the ticking of the clocks: “The church clock struck eight times.” (BA 5) The clock provides a certain structure for the characters, reminding them of the present moment: “And so [Mrs. Swithin] skipped, sidelong, from yeast to alcohol; so to fermentation; so to inebriation; so to Bacchus; and lay under purple lamps in a vineyard in Italy, as she had done, often; while Sands heard the clock tick; saw the cat; noted a fly buzz; [...]” (BA 20) Mrs. Swithin, as a character who is prone to fantasizing the most, in her mind goes to different time and space during common everyday tasks, while Sand listens to the clock, which seems to hold her in the present moment. The ticking of the clock, however, is not the only sound that

dominates the novel: ”Chuff, chuff, chuff, the machine buzzed.” (BA 41); “only the tick of the gramophone needle was heard. The tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced.” (BA 48), and much like the clocks, the sound of the machine and the gramophone are the symbols that mark the passage of time, reminding the characters of the time linearity: ”Tick, tick, tick the machine continued. "Marking time," said old Oliver beneath his breath.” (BA 48) Overall, the novel is overflowing with different sounds, similarly to *Mrs. Dalloway,* in which there is an abundance of images and scenes: ”Feet crunched the gravel. Voices chattered. The inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, [...] Scattered, shattered, hither thither summoned by the bell. 'Ping-ping-ping' that's the phone.” (BA 69)

The narrative technique that Woolf employed in the novel is what Snaith calls communal free indirect discourse, which shifts fixation from one character to another thus granting “a fluidity and movement in the scene.” (Snaith 74) The narrative voice is not omniscient, it is “silenced, left without identity” (Snaith 75), and is therefore part of the crowd. However, there is no dominant character in the novel, the point of view constantly changes and each character contributes to the plot equally. The large quantity of characters and their voices created a sense of chaos, especially when they appear all at once and in fragments, which occurs quite frequently in the novel:

> “There's the hay, let alone the movies… . What we need is a centre. Something to bring us all together … The Brookes have gone to Italy, in spite of everything. Rather rash? … If the worst should come—let's hope it won't—they'd hire an aeroplane, so they said… . What amused me was old Streatfield, feeling for his pouch. I like a man to be natural, not always on a perch … Then those voices from the bushes… Oracles?” (BA 113)

The whole novel seems to be built out of different fragments. Mrs Swithin reconstructs the past in her mind out of fragments of information she finds in her book and La Trobe offers fragments of history in her pageant. The term *fragment* is used even when describing the characters: ”Her hat, her rings, her finger nails red as roses, smooth as shells, were there for all to see. But not her life history. That was only scraps and fragments to all of them [...]” (BA 23) At the end of the play, during the part depicting the present, the actors come on stage holding broken mirror, thus showing the audience their distorted and fragmented reflections and then, finally, the message of the play is revealed: ”*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by* (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?” (*BA 107) According to Spiropoulou, The ‘scraps, orts and fragments’ motto is inspired by a line of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, and could therefore be a symbol of “fragmented modernity” (Spiropoulou 160).

The fragmentation of the plot creates a sense that the time is not actually progressing; we are faced with many images and sounds that are not causally linked. The sense of timelessness is also achieved through repetition: the sounds of the machine, gramophone and cows appear throughout the novel. The pageant itself is an event that repeats itself every year: “Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was—one or the other. The same chime followed the same chime [...]”. (BA 13) The whole composition of the novel is circular, and therefore repetitive in nature. At the end, people are leaving the property where the pageant took place, and the only ones left are the same characters who were there at the beginning; Mrs. Manresa, who was first to come is the last one to leave. Mrs. Swithin, just like at the beginning of the novel, is reading her book and,

before she falls asleep, she marks the end of the chapter, indicating that she will continue reading, creating a sense that everything that happened will be repeated once again.

3.3. *Orlando: A Biography*

Unlike the previous two novels, in which the events take place over a time span of circa twenty-four hours, this novel covers the period of four hundred years. The novel, subtitled *A Biography*, traces life of Orlando, a sixteen-year-old nobleman during the period of Queen Elizabeth's reign, whose sex then changes at the age of thirty (during the reign of Charles II). The specific time of the end of the novel is given: midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928 (the point at which Orlando is a thirty-six-year-old woman), which is also the date the novel was published, meaning that Woolf could not have chosen a more present time to mark the end of the novel. Having lived through so many decades, Orlando witnessed many changes in society and this biography serves as an illustration of a part of history through Orlando's eyes.

Spiropoulou maintains that Woolf wanted "to upset the terms and assumptions of history writing concerning method and truth", (Spiropoulou 75) calling the overall tone of the novel "conspicuously parodic." (Spiropoulou 75) The sign of these attitudes is visible already in the subtitle; a biography, as a piece of literary work that documents a real person's life in detail, is a text recording a part of history and therefore, by calling the novel a biography, Woolf removes the barrier between fiction and reality, i.e. a story and history. The truthfulness of this story, and of history writing in general, is challenged in many ways, the most obvious ones being Orlando's life-span and his/her change of gender, which completely shatter any kind of illusion of truthfulness. Woolf even goes as far as to include photographs depicting Orlando and Sasha, a woman with whom he falls in love, in the novel. However, in reality, the photographs are of Vita Sackville-West and Angelica Bell, people who Woolf knew personally. (Spiropoulou 76) This way, Woolf mocks both biography and photography as conveyors of truth and even further blurs the boundary between reality and fiction.

The narrative voice attempts to give the biography some credibility by referring to the historians, a supposed legitimate source of historical facts: ”The Great Frost was, historians tell us, the most severe that has ever visited these islands.” (O 15) However, this credibility is again detracted by the narrative voice itself while admitting having difficulties with telling Orlando’s story:

> ”The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando’s life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfill the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, [...]. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path,so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it.” (O 32)

Moreover, the narrative voice leans on sources that are mostly unreliable, such as legends and gossip, or fragmented and incomplete:

> ”But the revolution [...] and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what we can give is lamentably incomplete. Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle ofthe most important sentence. [...] We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain [...]”. (O62)

That the authority of the narrative voice is questionable is not only observable from what is included in the biography, but also from what is not. For instance, the names of Orlando’s parents or his date of birth are never given. Still, this does not mean that the dates were completely omitted from the novel. In fact, there are plenty of dates that are mentioned: for instance, the seventh of July is the day Orlando met Sasha and twenty-first of April, in seven o’clock on Monday he meets Nicholas Greene, etc. What is interesting here, however, is that

the dates included in the novel are never related to any important public event in Orlando's life, which would be expected from the biography. Instead, the narrative voice deals mainly with Orlando's private life and thoughts, while skipping information that may be much more relevant. This issue is even addressed by the narrative voice towards the end of the novel, when the biographer briefly mentions the prize Orlando won for the poem s/he was writing for roughly three hundred years:

> "[...] Memorial Prize which she had won; and we must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end,should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place — culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man." (O 160)

Having all of this in mind, it is hard to deny the parodic tone of the novel; the biographer talks about most important rule of writing a biography, which is to present truthful, historical facts ("Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known [...]") (O 32), only to break them, enabling Woolf to "upset the terms and assumptions of history writing concerning method and truth". (Spiropoulou 75)At a certain point in the novel, the narrative voice confirms this attitude by saying that "to give a truthful account of London society at that or indeed at any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian" (O 98) and that "[...] the truth does not exist. Nothing exists." (O 98)

Just like in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts,* the distinction between mind-time and clock-time can be observed and it is acknowledged by the narrative voice already at the beginning of the novel:

> ”But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second” (O 49)

Orlando spends majority of his time contemplating life and his surroundings and therefore, for him/her, mind-time starts to have almost the same effects as the clock-time: ”In such thinking (or by whatever name it should be called) he spent months and years of his life. It would be no exaggeration to say that he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least. Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most.” (O 49) and, as a result, “life seemed to him of prodigious length. Yet even so, it went like a flash.” (O 49- 50) Generally speaking, mind-time is more prominent than the clock-time and Orlando even seems to reject the external, i.e. clock time. For instance, at a certain point in the novel, s/he fails to wake up at the usual hour, and continues sleeping for a whole week, when s/he finally wakes up at the usual hour. (O 32) This way, s/he refused to follow the rules of the clock-time and woke up at his own time, proving that time has no effect over an individual. Still, the clock-time demands to be recognized and it is even more invasive than in the previous two novels:

> ” [...] the clock ticking on the mantelpiece beat like a hammer.And so for some seconds the light went on becoming brighter and brighter, and she saw everything more and more clearly and the clock ticked louder and louder until there was a terrific explosion right in her ear. Orlando leapt as if she had been violently struck on the head. Ten times she was struck. In fact it was ten o’clock in the morning. It was the eleventh October. It was 1928. It was the present moment.” (O 153)

The clock frequently appears in the moments when Orlando thinks about the past, as if to remind him/her of the present moment, and while doing so, many words expressing violence are used, making Orlando feel attacked by the present: ” [...] the present again struck her on the head. Eleven times she was violently assaulted.‘Confound it all!’ she cried, for it is a great shock to the nervous system, hearing a clock strike [...]” (O 157) Throughout the whole novel, clocks are linked to dark imagery, as if the time can only bring negative changes: ”As the ninth, tenth, and eleventh strokes struck, a huge blackness sprawled over the whole of London. With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All was darkness; all was doubt; all was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun.” (O 115) The abundance of dates and clocks specifying time seems ironical, considering that time has almost no effect over the main character and his/her life-span. They are simply here because people understand time through dates and time measuring units. Interestingly, during Orlando’s life with the gypsies in India, there is no mention of the exact dates and time, meaning that a clock could be viewed as a symbol of western culture.

A biography as a literary genre itself also illustrates the relativity of time perception, as the biographer is forced to compress one’s entire life to a several hundred pages. For instance, in this particular mock-biography, a life-span of four hundred years is restricted to less that two hundred pages. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the biographer manages to compress major events in Orlando’s life to a few sentences. For instance, when Orlando gave birth to a son, biographer wrote: ”‘It’s a very fine boy, M’Lady,’ said Mrs Banting, the midwife, putting her first-born child into Orlando’s arms. In other words Orlando was safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o’clock in the morning.” (O 151), and there is no mention of the child before or after that in the text. Not only are certain events depicted in only a few sentences, but, at a certain point in the novel, the biographer does the

same with the whole year of Orlando's life in a very banal way: "It was now November. After November, comes December. Then January,February, March, and April. After April comes May. June, July, August follow. Next is September. Then October, and so, behold, here we are back at November again, with a whole year accomplished." (O 137)

Although time does not have much impact on Orlando's life, it still affects Orlando's surroundings. The biographer quite frequently offers Orlando's views on the changes in society and it can be noticed that, at the beginning of the novel, these views are more positive: " [...] the Abbey windows were lit up and burnt like a heavenly, many-coloured shield (in Orlando's fancy)" and that "now all the west seemed a golden window with troops of angels (in Orlando's fancy again).", (O 25) while, towards the end of the novel, the descriptions of the city become more bleak: "The clouds had shrunk to a thin gauze; the sky seemed made of metal, which in hot weather tarnished verdigris, copper colour or orange as metal does in a fog. It was a little alarming — this shrinkage. Everything seemed to have shrunk." (O 152) Despite all these changes, one of the rare things that remains constant in Orlando's life is his/her house. The house occasionally even serves as a refuge from the changes brought on by time: "While this went on in every part of England, it was all very well for Orlando to mew herself in her house at Blackfriars and pretend that the climate was the same; that one could still say what one liked and wear knee-breeches or skirts as the fancy took one." (O 118) (Interestingly, it is frequently mentioned that the house contains 365 bedrooms and 52 staircases, which corresponds to the number of days and weeks of the year). Recurrence of certain motifs in the novel, such as the Orlando's house, the poem, The Oak Tree or even the heraldic leopard that is mentioned on the first page of the novel and then later appears again towards the end, create a sense of repetition. A sense of repetition is achieved through some characters as well. For instance, Nicholas Greene, who lives through many centuries, just like Orlando, never changes the subject of his conversations: "Indeed she could have sworn that

she had heard him say the very same things three hundred years ago. The names were different, of course, but the spirit was the same." (O 143) Moreover, at a certain point, Orlando claims: "'After all,' she thought, getting up and going to the window, 'nothing has changed. The house, the garden are precisely as they were. Not a chair has been moved, not a trinket sold. There are the same walks, the same lawns, the same trees, and the same pool, which, I dare say, has the same carp in it. True, Queen Victoria is on the throne and not Queen Elizabeth, but what difference… '" (O 121), this way annulling the time progression and all the changes that come along with it, and conveying the idea that human essence cannot be affected by time and always remains the same.

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4. Conclusion

This final paper deals with the (modernist) idea of progress as a subject being approached by Virginia Woolf in a very specific way in her novels: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *Between the Acts* (1941) and *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). Each of the novels display a different approach to time progress. The most prominent aspect of *Mrs. Dalloway* are the two concurrent storylines. Throughout the novel, there seems to be a strong emphasis on the simultaneity and acausality of the events. Everything is happening at once, i.e. everyone is caught up in their own narratives and therefore everyone experiences time differently. In *Between the Acts*, there is a sense that the time is not moving forward at all. Instead, history repeats itself, indicating the circularity of time and by making a pageant a central event in the novel, she carnevalizes both time and history. *Orlando*, at first glance, displays linear plot. However, for Orlando, along with a few other characters, time does not bring many changes. His/her identity as well as age remain almost unchanged for four hundred years, almost as if s/he was caught up in perpetual present, thus indicating a complete atemporality. By putting emphasis on either simultaneity, circularity or atemporality in her novels, Woolf in a way dismantles temporality and illustrates disbelief in time. If there is no progress in time, there cannot be any progress of the narrative. This also affects the idea of history, considering that history is a sort of a story portraying a sequence of events, i.e. a narrative. In the novels, Woolf is parodying history, thus detracting its credibility. This is visible the most in the way she incorporates important historical figures in the novels, only to mock them. Therefore, along with the idea of time and narrative progress, Woolf rejects the notion of history as well.

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Modernistički roman i ideja progresa: čitenja romana Virginie Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts i Orlando*: *A Biography)*

Sažetak

Ovaj završni rad analizira pristup V. Woolf ideji progresa na primjerima triju njezinih romana: *Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts* i *Orlando: A Biography*. Sama ideja je posebno potaknuta brzim društvenim, tehnološkim i znanstvenim inovacijama koja su nastale u modernosti. Ta ideja nerazdvojiva je od koncepta vremena i kada se radi o književnoj fikciji toga perioda, može se ustvrditi da ona oslovljava probleme kao što su temporalnost (vremenski redoslijed događaja u priči te njezinom diskursu) kao i narativnost općenito. Ne treba naglašavati da su temporalnost i narativnost blisko povezane s konceptom povijesti u historiografskom i književnom smislu. U povijesnom pogledu, očigledno je da je Prvi svijetski rat doveo u pitanje ideju prograse kao takvu, a sva tri romana obrađena u ovom radu su napisana nakon rata. Naša analiza romana V. Woolf dovodi do zaključka da književna fikcija Virginie Woolf podriva ideju progresa. Njezina nevjerica u ideju progresa izražena je njezinim inzistiranjem na simultanost i akauzalitet (u *Mrs. Dalloway*), cirkularnost i karnevalizaciju vremena (u *Between the Acts*) te potpunu atemporalnost (u *Orlando: A Biography*)

Ključne riječi: Virginia Woolf, modernizam, temporalnost, narativnost, povijest, Mrs. Dalloway, Between the Acts, Orlando, Prvi svjetski rat, Industrijska revolucija, progres