

“The Time is Out of Joint”: A Derridian Reading of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, originally titled *The Hours*, examines time as a critical force in shaping one’s life. In the fiction, time, like a guiding thread, weaves each character’s life, creating an ever growing, gigantic web that connects the conscious and unconscious, individual bodies and collective souls. More than sixty years after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Jacques Derrida, in his paper “The Time is Out of Joint” (1995b), also commented on the otherness-oriented nature of time, with specific regard to *Hamlet*. Time is, as the title of his paper suggests, “out of joint,” and it is this disjuncture of time that causes Hamlet’s madness. The present paper, therefore, attempts to examine how Woolf’s novel encapsulates Derrida’s idea of deconstruction with respect to time while discussing a new framework by integrating Derrida’s theory and reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*. We will first explore the madness of time, expressed by Woolf and Derrida, and then discuss how the

fragmentation of time renders man incapable of action. Finally, we will raise a possible solution arrived at by Woolf and Derrida: art-life theory as a positive *pharmakon* which can help us heal the wound of time and, more importantly, *learn to live* when time is *out of joint*. This paper will conclude by discussing how the continuum of the repetitive joint-disjoint-joint of time constitutes the impact of time on man.

Key Words: Virginia Woolf, Jacques Derrida, time, deconstruction