



**The Duality of Place and Self Space in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway***  
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**Abstract in English**

Abstract in English in Times New Roman, font size 12.

**Abstract**

From the perspective of spatial theories, the present paper will conduct a close reading of Virginia's Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* to interpret the concept of place identity as articulated in Yi-Fu Tuan's *Place and Space: The perspective of Experience* (2001). Through the lens of Tuan's place vs. space, this paper will explore the emotional attachment to certain places and how these places shape individual identities. Moreover, it will provide a way of comprehending how place identity influences the heroine 's perception of the world, her own life and her experience as an upper-class woman and the wife of a political figure. To achieve this

**Paper Info**

**Keywords**

*place, space, Clarissa, Dalloway  
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effect, Woolf crafts a series of visions where

Clarissa Dalloway claims a part of the ‘world’,

inhabits it, commands and actively creates it.

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## 1. Introduction

As being a richly dense and nuanced concept in the cultural and social science studies, place identity requires a deep study to differentiate it from other interrelated connotations including identity itself. Weichhart, an Austrian geographer, regional researcher, and a retired professor of human geography, defines identity as “an object or entity  $x$  is identical with itself:  $x=x$ . Thus, identity is the prerequisite for an entity  $x$  to actually be recognized as  $x$  and to be distinguishable from other entities” ( 2018, p.3).

From a psychological perspective, one of the identity’s variants is a person’s ego-identity (also referred to as I – identity or self – identity). Ego –identity results from a reflective act of consciousness used by the individual to process experiences of their own existence .It expresses a person’s self-image and details including age, gender, personal history, cultural and social background, occupation, references group, religion or ethnicity. One may also refer, when describing one’s own self to other people position in physical spaces: place of birth, place of residence, spaces for social interaction or spatial-social milieus that could be considered as a background for developing one’s cultural identity (Weichhart , 2018, p. 3).

With equivalent psychological depth, the psychologist Carl Freidrich Graumann identifies the difference between identity and identification. He considers identification as a deliberate process, a wake cognition that happens through three basic operations: identification of, being identified and identification with. Graumann defines “identification of” as a linguistic process of recognizing certain entities, identifying them as certain objects (people, social circumstances or physical objects), naming them, usually ascribing certain attributes to them, hence describing the identity of the object in question. This identity is defined by the entity’s location in physical space, its demarcation from other objects and its properties. In the context of this identification, place identity refers to a spatial object being represented emotionally and cognitively in an individual’s consciousness or through a group’s collective judgment (1983).

The second of the operations through which the process of identification happens is ‘being identified’. It happens during social interactions when each person becomes the object of identification and is ascribed with certain social attributes that are accompanied by social roles, the related expectations and spatial classifications. With regard to the spatial classifications, people identified in this way may be assigned certain character traits typical of the inhabitants of these places. Place identity, in this sense, can refer to the mental representations of the human subject in an individual consciousness or, as in the process of the group’s collective judgment. The identified person is ascribed character traits that can be derived from their position in physical space.

“Identification with”, is the third of the operations of identification, where one identifies oneself with certain objects, to make a given object one’s own, and relate it in some way to one’s own ego-identity. Place identity, in this regard becomes the mental representation and emotional evaluation of elements within the everyday

environment that the individual integrates into their collective “we- group” (Graumann ,1983).

Hence, place identity is such a convertible concept upon which many psychological theories of human environment relation are made. Many scholars have contributed to enriching its meaning. Proshansky is one of the leading scholars who initially presented place identity as:

those dimensions of the self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment (1978, p.155).

Paasi is another leading scholar who distinguished two aspects of place identity, namely place identity of a place and people’s place identity. The first refers to those features of nature, culture and people that are used in the discourses of science, politics, tourism, and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one place from another. The second refers to the identification of individuals with a place. (Paasi, as cited in Peng, Strijker,&Wu,2020,p.2). The contribution of Proshansky and Paasi have inspired and led to a discursive formulations of meaning formulation in place identity. However, there are other scholars whose studies have contributed to expanding the concept, among whom is Yi Fu Tuan.

From the perspective of spatial theories, the present paper undertakes a close reading of Virginia Woolf (1882 -1941)’s *Mrs. Dalloway* to interpret the concept of place identity through Tuan’s theory as stated in his book *Place and Space: The perspective of Experience* (2001). Examining the novel through the lens of Tuan’s place vs. space, the analysis highlights the emotional attachment to certain places and how these places shape their identities. The approach will not only enable a new and an

additional layer of grasping how place identity influences the heroine's perception of the world and experience, but also to understand how readers may perceive their own experience in their own world.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework:

People in different cultures differ in the way they divide their world, assign value to its parts, and measure them. Yet certain cross – cultural similarities exist. Human posture , the structure of the body, and the distance between human beings, often serves as the measure of all things. The body, in Tuan's perspective, occupies a space, while man is both an object in the 'world', occupying a small part of its space, and inhabiting the world, commanding and shaping it.

Yi Fu Tuan (1930-2022), a Chinese – born American geographer ,was a well-known figure in human geography, and the originator of humanistic geography. In his book *Place and Space: The perspective of Experience*, he defines places as “centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied” (2001, p.4). Although culture affects people's sense of place and space, the idea of place and space require each other for identification:

From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space... if we think of a space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 2001, p.6).

In the literature of environmental quality, few works attempt to explore how people feel about within place and space, Virginia Woolf's *Mr. Dalloway* is one of these works.

*Mrs. Dalloway*(1925) often referred to as the London novel (Chen,2015) , records a single day in the middle of June, in the life of the heroine, Clarissa Dalloway, an upper class woman and the wife of a political figure, Richard Dalloway. Set in post-world war time ,the novel follows Clarissa as she spends the day wandering through the city of London. Her walk through the streets is not just a movement through a physical space, but a journey into the inner dimensions of her mind, a journey in the psychological space. Woolf presents her character as divided across multiple levels of experience and perception, demonstrating an external reality of gradual separation and disintegration. The tension reveals the contradiction between the city as a space of perception and a space of power, epitomizing the chaotic post-war order (Cui,2019,p.42).

In his experiential perspective, Tuan suggests that experience “has a connotation of passivity, the world suggests what a person has undergone or suffered ... [and] a reality is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought” (2001,p.9). In her walk that she takes from her place at Westminster to the flower shop at Bond Street and back home, Clarissa reflects on her past experiences. The physical spaces she walks through are enough to create a reality shaped by her passionate attachment not only to the paths she traverses but to the spaces they offer. Tuan defines place as a special kind of object a “concentration of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell” (2001, p.12). To comprehend Clarissa’s experiences, burdens, and the circumstances she can tolerate or resist, we need to trace her walk through the streets of London. Crossing Victoria Street, Clarissa contemplates her love for the busy life of London:

In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor car, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging, brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and jingle and the strange high

singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June (Woolf, 1996, p.4).

At St. James Park, the scene changes into silence and provokes new values inside her. There, she meets her old friend Hugh Whitbread and hears of his sick wife Evelyn. Her attachment to Hugh and his wife comes partly because she has known him always and partly because of being a good sort of man in his own way. Yet Hugh's presence is accompanied by her reflections on both Peter Walsh, her old friend and lover, and Bourton, her girlhood town.

If the London's scenes in the novel represent the present in Clarissa's life, then Bourton's narrative thread stresses the past. It not only introduces Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, but also portrays Clarissa in her girlhood years and traces all the reasons behind her later life choices. Clarissa contemplates on "how sheltered the life at Bourton was ... There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world" (Woolf, 1996, p.25).

Bourton signifies an entire different experience in Clarissa's life. There, she was able to communicate and exchange her ideas away from the rigid division of class and gender in London. Bourton, thus, represents a space of freedom in Clarissa's life. Tuan comments on spaciousness as being "closely associated with the sense of being free. Freedom implies space" (2001, p.52). Freedom is one of the most important human desires, yet it is always threatened with exposure and vulnerability: "Human lives are dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom... In open space one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place, the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence" (Tuan, 2001, p. 54).

Clarissa's temporal shift from the present (London) to the past (Bourton) helps the reader to understand her prior identity and her succeeding transformation. It is a shift that evokes or awakens a painful truth or a "haunting presence" (Tuan, 2001, p. 54). Her walk in London is not something she is used to doing, yet today is a special day in her life after a period of illness in which she was confined to bed. Getting sick at fifty, she must have thought of life and death, of her satisfaction in being Mrs. Dalloway, and of all the reasons behind that.

In his perspective on time and space, Tuan argues that space has a temporal meaning for a poet, in the mystique of exploration, and in the drama of migration. Space also has acquires a significant at the level of everyday personal experience. Language itself reveals the intimate relationship among people, space, and time. "I am (or we are) here; here is now. You (or they) are there; there is then, and then refers to a time which may be either the past or the future" (2001, p.126).

In Westminster, symbolized by the recurring sound of Big Ben heard throughout the course of the day, Clarissa's long residence in the city becomes a status symbol. It deepens her relation with the place and shapes her identity and attachment to it, and most importantly creates a sense of familiarity. For Tuan, Familiarity is a characteristic of the past: the home and long habitation in spaces provide an image of the past. He explains that an ideal sense of home lies at the center of one's life, and center connotes origin and beginnings (2001, p. 28).

At the beginning of the novel, Clarissa remembers Peter Walsh even before her husband, Richard Dalloway. This recollection is something crucial in the life of the heroine. Throughout the narrative, we learn that Clarissa, deliberately chooses to break off her relationship with Peter and marry Richard. Self-determination and freedom serve as essential determinant in shaping her life decisions. Marrying Peter would have

cost her the privacy of her thoughts and feelings. She believes in the privacy of the soul: “Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?... Somehow one respected that...but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul” (Woolf,1996, p.92). Intentionally, she chooses to distance herself from Peter, who would have demanded a total renunciation , a total sharing of all of her feelings of fear, joy , hope and anticipation and an absolute surrender and that would have robbed her ‘private soul’ and her self space:

So she would still find herself arguing in St. James’s Park, still making out that she had been right – and she had too – not to marry him. For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him... But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into (Woolf,1996, p.6).

Tuan believes that distance:

connotes degrees of accessibility and also concern. Human beings are interested in other people and objects of importance to their live hood. They want to know whether the significant others are far or near with respect to themselves and each other (2001, p.46).

This perspective explains that her tendency to keep a distance from Peter and even her husband is but Clarissa’s special means to avoid her constant sense of insecurity, fear of sharing and complete surrender. It is unsurprising that after years of distance, she still remembers Peter’s comments on Hugh and on Richard. The lingering motive in her present life is to see whether distance has emotionally detached Peter from being a meaningful part of her identity.This highlights the fact that in her wandering in London, Clarissa wants to break free from the confines of loneliness and solitude she

has deliberately chosen. Her present state of disconnection, marked by interpersonal communication shapes the psychological space she finds in London's urban places (Zhao&Zhang,2022). However, Clarissa's vibrant, sensitive, and impulsive nature is still alive and longs once again to feel the pulse of London and tastes its vitality: "she felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside looking on ... she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (Woolf, 1996, p.6). Although she possesses that innate ability to read and connect once again with others, Clarissa lived on the fringes of life. Lately, she has been ill and near death, as the world has been near death too. Her doctors interpret her illness as a sickness of the heart, rendered frail by inactivity. Now she is healing, the mere physical act of walking through the streets of London provides a psychological relief from her solitude. On Bond Street, she reaches the flower shop, and the unusual walk situated in the physical space of London and the anticipation of her present, past and present again is what makes the walk an unusual experience.

Clarissa's sense of isolation could be found in the scene in which she describes the city's means of transport: "She had a personal sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone" (Woolf, 1996, p.6). In the early twenties, the new modes of transportation become part of London's cityscape, in a sense they are not only vehicles but also characters in the story and have their effect in relation to her experience in the city. Andrew Thacker, in his 2003 book *Moving Through Modernity*, believes that the taxicabs symbolize isolated traveler rather than the communal experience of bus or train travel, which shows a different side to the life and vitality of the city, where each day contains danger, particularly of urban anomie (2003, p. 159). Clarissa's sudden anxiety, her feelings that unite her with the taxi traveler, and her sense

of being out to sea alone, is perhaps less a current state than a shiver of anticipation. In the context of transportation, this moment is both expressive and indicative of her emotional isolation. The taxi cab is symbolic of the uncertainty that occupies her inner being as she wanders in the solitude induced- streets, an inner being that follows the part of the narrative in which she justifies her choice for not marrying Peter (Krstić, 2021, p.43). Still, moving through and surrendering to the city streets offer a clear demonstration of overcoming a sense of isolation and separation (Thacker,2003, p.159). Considering the man- made isolation in the shape of build environment, Tuan believes that they are like language in refining human feelings: “The build environment has the power to ‘define’ and ‘refine’ sensibility” (2001, p.107).

In her account of Clarissa’s attic room, Woolf says: “like a nun withdrawing, or child exploring a tower, she went upstairs... There was emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room”(1996, p.23). Going upstairs after her walk is not only a physical but metaphorical retreat of her body and soul, but a depiction of an isolation she has chosen. Richard Dalloway’s house represents the social space where she is expected to live her sheltered life, while the attic room is an extra out - of - the way place where she is to hide away, be her own self and to claim her self-space. The attic room contrasts with the Hall, where most of the house parties are held, and where she performs the role she has chosen, Mrs. Dalloway. Zhao & Zhong believe that social space often brings about the repression and fragmentation of the individual’s self, and consequently the changes that the space in which one lives. Within the upper- class home and its hall, Clarissa is the wife of an upper – class member, but an empty presence. The attic room, on the other hand, is the space that allows Clarissa to feel sheltered and secure as an individual and where she possesses the power to fill that emptiness. The room is marginal to the overall structure of the house, almost forgotten, yet enables her to reclaim her true

identity as a marginal being. This marginality makes her independent from the dominance of a complete surrender. This is what Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" embodies because only when the space belongs to oneself, does oneself become independent (2022, pp.155-156).

Tuan believes that:

Solitude is a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity. Alone one's thoughts wander freely over space. In the presence of others they are pulled back by an awareness of other personalities who project their own worlds onto the same area. Fear of space often goes with fear of solitude. To be in the company of human beings- even with one other person- has the effect of curtailing space and its threat of openness. On the other hand, as people appear in space, for every one point is reached when the feeling of spaciousness yields to its opposite – crowding (2001, p. 59).

Setting the narrative in England after the First World War is of crucial importance and relevance to Clarissa's health state. England is still shrouded in the dismay and darkness of the war and Clarissa is still under the effect of her sickness like her country, she is still in a state of fear and confusion of death: "Did it matter then, she asked herself ... did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?"(Woolf,1996, p.7). However, through the detailed planning of the evening party scheduled to take place in her house, she manages to divert her attention from thoughts of death and fear: "Fear no more the heat O' the sun Nor the furious winter's rages"(Woolf,1996,p.7). This leads to consider the 'inside' and 'outside' of intimacy and exposure of private life and public space through the lens of Tuan's perspective on the matter. He believes that constructed form has the power to heighten awareness and

accentuate the difference in emotional temperature between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. The home construction has developed significantly over time, reflecting basic changes in how humans create shelters.

In Neolithic times, basic shelters were semisubterranean huts, a wormlike enclosures that contrasted with the space beyond. Later, shelters emerged above ground, moving away from the earth but retaining and accentuating the contrast between interior and exterior through the aggressive rectilinearity of their walls. At later stages, corresponding to the beginning of urban life, the rectangular courtyard domicile appeared as the Neolithic culture made the transition to urban life. Such houses remain still with us today. Their basic feature is that the rooms open out to the privacy of the interior space and present their blank walls to the outside world. Within and without are clearly defined. Inside the enclosure, undisturbed by distractions from the outside, human relations and feelings can rise to a high and even uncomfortable level of warmth (Tuan, 2001,p.107).

There is an intrinsic contradiction between Clarissa’s private demeanor in her attic and her public character in the Hall of the house and this discrepancy is accentuated by the presence of lights. In the aftermath of sickness and war and under the candle light, she lives in gloominess and darkness, captured by her thoughts of death:

There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room ... The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrow and narrower would be her bed be. The candle was half burnt down ...Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed. (Woolf, 1996, p. 23).

Clarissa’s appearance reflects her inner state: “She had grown older... It was true. Since her illness she had turned almost white” (p.27). Under the dim light of the sun or

the half burnt candle, she appears as a white haired woman standing beside a white sheeted bed. By contrast, under the artificial light, she is but another character, choosing a green colored dress, and prepares it for the evening party: “By artificial light the green shone” (p,28). Both she and her dress shine under the lights of her parties, but both lose their vibrancy under real lights: “lost its color now in the sun”(p.28). Yet, she would mend her green dress, with her silks, her scissors and her thimble to wear it for the party as she would mend herself for the evening event: “Every time she gave a party she had this feelings of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another” (Woolf, 1996. p ,124).

This imagery calls back Tuan’s concept of spatial organization, and how people differ in the way they divide up their world and assign values to its parts. Tuan explains that the posture and the structure of human body and the relation between human beings are of the fundamental principles of spatial organization. Tuan suggests that when we think of a ‘man’ and ‘world’, we do not merely think of man as an object in the world, occupying a small part of its space, but also of a man inhabiting the world, commanding and creating it. To be in command of space is to feel at home in it and that the objective reference points in space such as landmarks conform to the intention and the coordinates of the human body. At the same time, to feel disoriented in a still organized space, as being in a forest with flickering light, the sense of disorientation remains. The flickering light helps to establish a goal and move towards it and leave the dark space behind. It is the human body that imposes schema on space and that the human body marks that schema on those occasions that lift life above the ordinary and forces him to an awareness of life’s values. (2001).

In his theory, Tuan considers spatial dimensions vertical or horizontal, mass or volume as experiences known to the body: “the meaning of these spatial dimensions

gains immeasurably in power and clarity when they can be seen in monumental architecture and when people live in its shadow” (2001, p.108). Accordingly, architecture can educate people’s awareness and conception of reality through the domain of the illuminated interior. There is an enduring antithesis between ‘inside’ and outside and this is applicable to both humble dwellings as well as a grand structures. Historically, interior spaces were dark and narrow, but the demand for light in defining interior spaces continued to expand, for the designed environment serves an educational purpose. In some societies, the building is the primary text for handing down a tradition, and for presenting a view of reality (Tuan, 2001, pp.111-112).

The role of light in Clarissa’s life corresponds with the role of the flickering light that appears behind a distant clump of trees in Tuan’s argument. Under different kind of lights, real or artificial, Clarissa remains disoriented, yet she establishes a goal and moves towards it. That mere movement, physical or mental, lifts her life and forces a sense of value:

one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her (Woolf,1996,p.28)

That woman is what she becomes when with some effort, and “some call on her to be herself” (Woolf,1996,p.28). Clarissa’s Hall parties turn to be her rebirth place, the building and the primary text for handing down tradition, and presenting a view of reality. She becomes “different”, “incompatible” and “composed so far the world only into one center” (Woolf, 1996, p.28). Thus, Mrs. Dalloway’s true identity emerges, as she courageously claim her self space, bringing her journey to a transformative close.

### 3. Conclusion

Having examined Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) in the light of Tunas' theory of place identity as presented in his book *Place and Space: The perspective of Experience* (2001), the following could be concluded: Firstly, the going out in a trip to the flower shop in London offers Clarissa a space to escape from the reality of confronting the strict social norms imposed on her as Mrs. Dalloway, the wife of a political figure. Moreover, this acts marks the rediscovery of the inner self since, as she finally does something for herself, something that turns her from a politician's wife into a true observant subject.

Secondly, her wandering through the streets of London allows her break free from the restraints of upper echelon in the house of the Dalloways, as being a member of the English upper class.

Finally, the physical space Clarissa traverses is enough to create a reality of her passionate attachment not only to the pathos she moves through but also to the spaces these paths offer.

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Abstract in Arabic

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ثنائية المكان والفضاء الذاتي في رواية السيدة دالواي لفيرجينيا وولف

المستخلص

يتناول البحث الراهن في ضوء النظرية المكانية قراءة عميقة لمفهوم الشخصية المكانية والفضاء الذاتي وكما تعكسها رواية السيدة دالواي (1925) للروائية فيرجينيا وولف وفقاً لفلسفة توان المنظر في الجغرافية الانسانية و مفهومه عن المكان والفضاء وكما جاء في كتابه الموسوم المكان و الفضاء: منظور التجربة (2001) حيث يصف توان كيف ان التصاق الفرد بأماكن معينة ينجح في خلق ارتباطاً متنامياً بينه وبين فضاءه الذاتي ويسهم في رسم شخصيته الخاصة و كيف ان للمكان القوة على منح بطلة القصة القدرة على تعريف عالمها الخاص من خلال تجربتها الشخصية كسيدة من علية القوم وزوجة شخصية سياسية مرموقة وفي هذا السياق عمدت الكاتبة على خلق سلسلة من الصور عكست من خلالها قدرة البطلة على خلق وابداع فضاءاً خاصاً شبيهاً بها ترسخ من خلاله وجودها وتعمر حيزها فيه وتشارك في تشكيله وواعادة صياغته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المكان، الفضاء، كلاريسا، دالواي، توان، لندن، العزلة

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