

The Power of the Clock:  
Time in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*  
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A thesis presented for the B. A. degree  
with Honors in  
The Department of English  
University of Michigan  
Winter 2018







## Acknowledgements

This project could not have taken its current form without the influence and support of several professors. I would like to thank Professor Kerry Larson, whose foundational work with my thesis pushed me to define its terms and strengthen its arguments. Thank you to my thesis advisor, Professor Madhumita Lahiri for devoting her time to reading drafts of my work and engaging with my ideas. Professor Lahiri's constant encouragement and support helped me maintain a positive attitude about the evolution of my project. Thank you to Professor Gillian White for consistently uplifting the cohort and for making it clear that I could come to her with any issues. I would also like to extend my thanks to Professor Sean Silver, who encouraged me to apply to the Honors English Program.

Thank you to my dad for always giving me advice and for assuring me that I could take on the task of writing a thesis. Given the fact that he had very little interest in or knowledge of the topic, I appreciate that he periodically asked about the progress of my work.

Finally, thank you to Walter Butzu for inspiring my love of literature and for making me a better reader, a better writer, a better thinker, and a better person. He is the reason that I am an English major. This thesis would not exist without him.



## Abstract

Before the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conceptions of time followed Sir Isaac Newton's ideas about standard time – a time that was strictly linear and the same for all individuals. However, at the turn of the century, these ideas began to change. This thesis explores the ways in which F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, both published in 1925, respond to the emerging theories of time. In particular, the project focuses on Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity and Henri Bergson's ideas of durational time. Einstein's and Bergson's works drove a shift in theory from a concentration on linear standard time on the clock to a concentration on relative time and the nonlinear time of human experience.

Modernist literature arose in part as a response to the changing temporal landscape, and *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are often described in terms of their modernist experimentation with nonlinear time. In this thesis, I discuss the texts' reflections of Einstein's and Bergson's theories but ultimately state that the novels' presentations of the power of the clock suggest that nineteenth-century linear time cannot be abandoned even as the theoretical focus shifts to nonlinear time. I observe that in *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby refuses to acknowledge the force of the clock, while in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway is eventually able to accept the inescapable impact of linear time. I argue that through Gatsby's demise and Clarissa's survival, the novels demonstrate that individuals must recognize and accept the influence of the clock in order to survive. Thus, my analysis suggests that the texts cut against the trend of early-twentieth-century temporal theory and modernist literature through their assertions of the enduring power of the nineteenth-century clock.

Keywords: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, time, Albert Einstein, Theory of Relativity, Henri Bergson, durational time, modernism





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## Introduction

In intellectual and cultural circles of Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century, there was a fundamental shift in conceptions of time. Prior to this change, Sir Isaac Newton's theories about absolute time were widely accepted. There was a belief that time was standard and that each individual operated under the same time (Kern 88). Furthermore, time was thought to be strictly successive, taking an individual farther from his past; there was a sharp divide between the past and the present. However, these thoughts changed with Albert Einstein's 1905 Special Theory of Relativity. Einstein's theory states that measurements of time depend on the point from which they are measured; time is relative and, therefore, different for each individual (Einstein 20). The ideas of French philosopher Henri Bergson also gained acceptance and popularity at the turn of the century. One of Bergson's major contributions to the field was his theory about the durational quality of time. In contrast to existing understandings that claimed that the past was separate from the present, he stated that each present moment is composed of an accumulation of past moments and that, as a result, the past is always part of the present (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 4). Bergson also added to ideas about a distinction between linear time in the outer world and nonlinear time in the mind (Kershner 59). Throughout this thesis, the terms "inner time" and "clock time" are used to refer to nonlinear mental time and linear time on the clock, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The theories that were emerging in the early twentieth century led to an atmosphere in which time was understood as more complex than it was under previous conceptions. The seemingly rational approach to clock time no longer proved to be the scientific truth, and innovation around time affirmed individuals' subjective experiences of the outer world.

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<sup>1</sup> These terms appear in Niklas Salmose's "Reading Nostalgia: Textual Memory in *The Great Gatsby*".

Einstein's theory about a plurality of clocks and Bergson's ideas about the existence of the past in the present contributed to a growing sense that, as Ronald Berman states, "[time] was...something more than linear" ("Fitzgerald: Time, Continuity, Relativity" 37). As the nineteenth century came to a close, time could no longer be considered as marching solely forward. This shift in understandings of time influenced the literature of the period as writers reflected on the issue and grappled with the task of representing the nonlinearity of time.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* were both originally published in 1925, during an era preoccupied with time and during the height of literature's experimentation with time. Modernist writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries responded to the theoretical work on time by aiming to "represent in new ways the space and time of human experience" (Fobes 80). They attempted to depict duration by constructing narratives in which there was a felt continuity between the past and the present. The modern period, generally dated between 1890 and 1940 (Kershner 36), arose out of a shift in the way that individuals in the Western world perceived their lives. Part of this change was a result of the abandonment of the objectivity that was connected to Newton's theories of the universe (Kershner 56-57). With Einstein's and Bergson's formulations, the concept of time became subjective in the early twentieth century; time became personal. Thus, modernism worked against nineteenth-century rigid time and against realist portrayals of sequential time. During the modern era, time was a theme, formal device, and subject of debate, and the experimentation with time in *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* involves considerations of Einstein's and Bergson's theories. However, as this thesis demonstrates, Fitzgerald and Woolf do not entirely follow the modernist trend of abandoning the authority of the linear clock.

In this thesis, I explore the ways in which *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* not only manipulate time to reflect early-twentieth-century theories, but also, and more significantly, maintain the commanding influence of clock time while doing this work. Both novels respond to Einstein's and Bergson's theories of time through the presentation of protagonists who attempt to navigate a present that is filled with the past.<sup>2</sup> *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrate Bergson's ideas and work against sequential time by shifting between the past and the present and by revealing the past non-chronologically. The texts also emphasize relative inner time as the authors document the nonlinear shifts in Jay Gatsby's and Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts. However, neither novel ignores clock time. Clocks and images of forward motion are present in *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Linear clock time in the novels presents the backdrop against which characters' nonlinear inner times shift between the past and the present; time on the clock moves forward as the time in characters' minds constantly brings them to their pasts. Both authors also explore the idea of recapturing the past and whether or not that recovery is possible, with each ultimately asserting the power of the thrust of clock time. Consequently, these two modernist texts retain traditional elements of time even as they consider the new features of time that Einstein and Bergson propagate.

I argue that by highlighting the enduring force of the clock, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* suggest that despite the significant changes in thought brought about by Einstein and Bergson, the earlier understandings of time as linear cannot be discarded. This line of argumentation undercuts Stephen Kern's claim in *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* that Einstein's Theory of Relativity "dismantles" classical mechanics as well as Raymond

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<sup>2</sup> "The past" can take on several meanings. There are historical pasts, ancestral pasts, mythic pasts, collective pasts, and personal pasts, to name a few. In this thesis, the past refers to the personal pasts to which Gatsby and Clarissa devote much of their attention. For Gatsby and Clarissa, it is their personal pasts that they feel heavily in the present.

Vince's claim that "the strict, deterministic universe that [Newton] had birthed was beginning to look somewhat fuzzy: the clock was becoming cloudy" (Kern 18, Vince 88). It is true that in the early twentieth century the thinking about time shifted from orderly, standard clock time toward disorderly, relative inner time, and Fitzgerald and Woolf create narratives that highlight inner time and its nonlinearity. However, through deliberate inclusions of the clock, Fitzgerald and Woolf suggest that the clock remains a clear component of existence. This thesis asserts that *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* reveal that even in a world in which time is relative and in which nonlinear time allows for the past to be part of the present, the clock time that marches linearly forward and that dominates classical mechanics is an undeniable force in humans' lives that individuals must acknowledge in order to survive. Thus, discussions of the novels' manipulations of time should not center only on the ways in which they disrupt traditional notions but must also address the ways that the texts incorporate old and new theories of time; the full range of Fitzgerald's and Woolf's experimentation with time involves the enforcement of clock time in worlds of inner time. Rather than narrowly view the novels as examples of modernist temporal experimentation that desert the linear clock, this thesis demonstrates that readers must acknowledge the inclusions of nineteenth-century conceptions of the clock's authority in order to understand the endings of Gatsby's and Clarissa's stories.

While there is extensive scholarship on time in *The Great Gatsby* and on time in *Mrs. Dalloway*, many critics do not explicitly engage with Einstein's and Bergson's theories, and none explicitly name Einstein and Bergson together.<sup>3</sup> I argue that explicitly bringing together

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Benjamin, Pam Fox Kuhlken, Liesl Olson, and Ralph Samuelson each reference Bergson's theories in their commentaries on *Mrs. Dalloway*, while Alexander Fobes discusses Bergson's theories with *The Great Gatsby*. Paul Brown discusses *Mrs. Dalloway* with Einstein, while Ronald Berman, Tony Magistrale and Mary Jane Dickerson, and Raymond Vince write about *The Great Gatsby* and Einstein.

Einstein's and Bergson's thoughts with the two novels is valuable in divulging Fitzgerald's and Woolf's work of making the abstract category of time less abstract. Through a direct consideration of Fitzgerald and Woolf with Einstein and Bergson, it becomes clear that in *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the authors work to represent that time, rather than simply a theoretical concept, is a concrete phenomenon with which individuals struggle in daily life.

Einstein's and Bergson's ideas about time are conceptual, intangible notions. The fact that these theories are recognizable in the time that Fitzgerald and Woolf construct in their novels while the authors also represent clock time as a concrete element of life further reflects the novels' retention of traditional notions of time: Fitzgerald and Woolf are able to underline the real power of clock time by drawing on nineteenth-century thoughts that consider time as an absolute, governing force.

To offer context for this project, the first chapter of the thesis provides explanations of the shifts in thinking about time as well as descriptions of Einstein's and Bergson's theories. Building on this discussion, the second chapter explores the ways that *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* each represent Einstein's Theory of Relativity and Bergson's ideas of durational time not only in content but also in structure. I use readings of the passages about Gatsby's trip to Louisville and the green light on Daisy's dock to argue that Fitzgerald employs physical places and objects to represent the persistence of the past in the present. As the chapter shifts to an analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*, I describe Clarissa's recollections of her past as well as the movement of Peter Walsh – a close friend and suitor from her past – into her present. Drawing on observations from critics, I use Bergson's ideas to explain that by exploring the past through the timeframe of a single day, Woolf's novel highlights that a present day does not exist in isolation from the past. Through their non-sequential forms, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs.*

*Dalloway* represent the new ideas of time by paralleling the shift from a conception of time as entirely linear to a conception that includes a consideration of time as nonlinear.

After the second chapter's outlining of the ways that the novels feature the emerging theories of time, the third chapter analyzes the ways in which Fitzgerald and Woolf inject nineteenth-century notions of forward-moving clock time into their narrative worlds, complicating readings of the novels that focus only on their experimentation with nonlinear inner time. Through a concentration on the emphasis on time and the clock in the reunion between Gatsby and the woman he loves, Daisy Buchanan, in the fifth chapter of the novel, I describe Fitzgerald's work to underscore the friction between time in Gatsby's mind and time on the clock. The discussion of clock time in *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses on the physical clocks in the novel, particularly the consistent tolling of Big Ben. I argue that by submerging her characters in a world in which the clock is a clear presence, Woolf joins inner time and clock time in the novel. The examination of these aspects of the novels leads to the argument that Fitzgerald highlights the tension between inner time and clock time while Woolf works to bring together the two types of time, authorial moves that both ultimately acknowledge the enduring influence of the clock.

The fourth chapter shifts to discuss Gatsby and Clarissa as characters, with an emphasis on the manner in which they respond to clock time. As I draw comparisons between Gatsby and Clarissa, I underline their shared desire to work against the force of the clock. Gatsby's constant hosting of parties creates the illusion that time is not moving forward, allowing him to feel that he is acting against clock time. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, routine is also a part of characters' lives that contributes to a sense that they have control over clock time or that they can slow the clock. Although both Gatsby and Clarissa strive to defy clock time, Clarissa acknowledges the present



as she works against the clock, while Gatsby's focus is on a return to the past. I observe that these differences in mentality lead each character to divergent endings by the conclusions of the novels, thus suggesting that Fitzgerald and Woolf demonstrate that attitudes toward time have implications for survival.

The final two chapters are devoted to the endings of Gatsby's and Clarissa's stories. In the fifth chapter, I explain that Gatsby's inability to understand the power of the linear clock prevents him from surviving in the world that Fitzgerald creates – a world imbued with linear and nonlinear time. While outlining the influence of clock time, Fitzgerald stages the collapse of Gatsby's dream, making it clear that it is not possible to recover the past. After presenting moments in which it appears that time is suspended or that Gatsby will recapture the past, Fitzgerald ultimately stresses that clock time is a powerful force that runs irreversibly forward. *The Great Gatsby* suggests, in other words, that the nineteenth-century clock dominates inner time, thus working against both the direction of early-twentieth-century temporal theory as well as the direction of modernist literature.

As a counterbalance to Gatsby's demise, the sixth chapter describes the reasons that Clarissa survives despite her desire to slow clock time and despite her focus on the past. Woolf, like Fitzgerald, highlights that clock time moves forward and that an individual must accept this in order to survive. By focusing on Clarissa's party and the manner in which her perception of time shifts during the event when she goes to the little room, I argue that Clarissa accepts this reality of clock time. Critics have differing views about the type of time in Clarissa's house, with those like James Hafley suggesting that the larger room of the party houses the clock. I claim that the little room is the space filled with the clock. If the party is, as I suggest, a space of inner time, then Clarissa's return to the party after accepting clock time in the little room points to *Mrs.*

*Dalloway*'s proposition that individuals must allow inner time and clock time to coexist in their minds; individuals cannot focus solely on the new theories of the early twentieth century.

Although *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are two texts from the same year that explore notions of time, the existing scholarship about the ways in which Fitzgerald and Woolf construct time addresses *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* separately. Alexander Fobes discusses Fitzgerald and Woolf together, but he uses *To The Lighthouse*, not *Mrs. Dalloway*, in his analysis of each author's representation of time. The result is a study that outlines a destructive mindset – one solely focused on the past and inner time – without providing an example of a constructive mindset – one that I argue Clarissa achieves, which balances inner time and clock time. With this thesis, I hope to illuminate that, when read together, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* offer a view of the mindset needed to survive in the present while depicting worlds that reflect both nineteenth-century and twentieth-century conceptions of time. Placing the texts alongside one another underscores the reasons for each protagonist's ending. Fitzgerald presents the fatal consequences of a monomaniacal focus on the past and inner time while Woolf presents the balance between inner time and clock time – between modern theories of time and non-modern theories of time – that is necessary to survive in a post-1900 world in which clock time is a force and the past is part of the present. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran whose mind is overwhelmed by visions of the past, provides an example of the destructive mindset that Gatsby possesses. However, the juxtaposition of *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* makes more explicit the orientation toward time that is necessary for survival in the early twentieth century than is available through the internal contrast of Septimus and Clarissa, which involves the complication and distraction of war and trauma. While Gatsby consciously refuses to acknowledge the force of clock time, Septimus is

rendered unable to recognize it by trauma, making Septimus' ideas about time a less effective contrast to Clarissa's, given that Clarissa, like Gatsby, is in control of her thoughts of the clock.

In a period consumed by thoughts of time, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* each dramatize the tension and interaction between inner time and clock time that Einstein's and Bergson's theories underline. Taken together, Einstein's and Bergson's theories illustrate a present in which each individual has his own, nonlinear time in a world where clocks attempt to standardize time. The definition of entropy, which states that the universe always tends toward disorder, suggests that clock time moves irreversibly forward (Jha). Therefore, when coupled with the thoughts of Einstein and Bergson, a situation arises in which the past is part of the present but can never be recovered because the one-way movement of clock time exists as an impenetrable obstacle. Rather than focus exclusively on inner time, Fitzgerald's and Woolf's novels explore this conflict between inner time and clock time, thus underscoring the persisting power of the clock. Both novels are celebrated as experimental texts that radically break with traditional representations of time, but their ultimate treatment of the clock undermines a clean break with nineteenth-century portrayals. The emphasis moves to relative, inner time during the modern era as Einstein and Bergson alter the theoretical landscape. However, this thesis argues that through novels in which a focus on inner time is accompanied by the forceful presence of clock time and in which a protagonist must balance linear and nonlinear time in order to survive, Fitzgerald and Woolf maintain nineteenth-century considerations of time to demonstrate the essentiality of recognizing the weight of the linear clock.

## I. Theories and Conceptions of Time

From the seventeenth century until the early twentieth century, Sir Isaac Newton's theories about time dominated the theoretical landscape. Under Newton, time was considered to be homogenous, absolute, and orderly (Kern 11). In the nineteenth century, "a series of international conventions" were developed in an attempt to bring further order to ideas of time (Vince 88). Eventually, in 1884, the International Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C. set Greenwich in London as the Prime Meridian (Vince 88). It was agreed that Greenwich Mean Time would provide the basis for the standardization of time (Vince 88). Thus, alongside the dominance of Newtonian understandings of absolute time was a political and juridical movement to standardize time on a global level. Nations implemented standard time in an effort to coordinate systems of transportation and communication and to accommodate industrial growth (Hama 11). The resulting order led global leaders to feel that they had control over time. In this way, the establishment of time zones and the elaborate efforts to standardize railroad time in the nineteenth century reflected a tacit acknowledgment of time's prosaic variation; time was viewed as an entity that needed to be standardized and regulated through conventions and laws.

However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, Newton's ideas about standardized time were beginning to be challenged in intellectual and academic communities, even as the political ideas of time remained focused on rigidity. The debate about homogenous versus heterogeneous time came from novelists, psychologists, physicists, and sociologists who observed that each individual considered time in his own manner, leading to considerations of the divide between time in the mind and time on the clock (Kern 15). As these conversations intensified, the simplicity and rigidity of a single, standard time was no longer universally

accepted. By the close of the nineteenth century, it was not assumed that clock time was the only valid representation of time.

In the early twentieth century, these debates were transformed by Albert Einstein's publication of the Theory of Relativity. There are two parts to Einstein's theory: the 1905 Special Theory of Relativity deals with time, simultaneity, and uniform motion while the 1915 General Theory of Relativity deals with accelerated motion and a four-dimensional space-time continuum (Kershner 57; Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* 24). Central to Einstein's theory is his stress on the importance of naming a point of reference, and relativity claims that there are multiple systems of reference. According to the Special Theory of Relativity, "every reference-body (coordinate system) has its own particular time. Unless we are told the reference-body to which the statement of time references, there is no meaning in a statement of the time of an event" (Einstein 20). The implication is that the measurement of time depends on the point from which it is measured, meaning that each individual, as a point of reference, has his own conception of time. The 1919 solar eclipse confirmed Einstein's predictions about the need for reference points when describing time,<sup>4</sup> causing him to become a well-known figure and solidifying the shift in the way that individuals considered time (Kershner 57). With the acceptance of Einstein's theory, there was no longer a single, absolute time coordinate used for measurements. Einstein observes that before the development of the Theory of Relativity, it had been assumed that "the statement of time had an absolute significance, i.e. that it [was] independent of the state of motion of the body of reference" (Einstein 20). In a world that accepted Newton's theories of

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<sup>4</sup> The 1919 solar eclipse affirmed Einstein's Theory of Relativity by proving "that gravity could bend light beams" (Overbye). During the eclipse, Arthur Eddington, a British astronomer, saw that the gravitational field of the sun moved the light rays of distant stars from their paths (Overbye). Eddington's observations supported Einstein's theory that time could "warp," (Overbye) implying that time was not singular, standard, or rigid.

time, there was only one time that was considered, and that time was taken to be supreme for all individuals. With the Theory of Relativity, however, “time is robbed of its independence” (Einstein 37). Time no longer exists without an observer. It becomes dependent on a system of coordinates; it becomes dependent on the individual as a point of reference. Thus, the Theory of Relativity not only challenges the validity of clock time but also affirms the subjective variation of individuals’ inner time.

When the French philosopher Henri Bergson writes about time in the early twentieth century, he writes about it as a fluid entity. According to Bergson, each present moment is an accumulation of past moments (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* 2). He understands the past as constructing the present, thus offering an image of time as a continuous flow from the past to the present. According to Bergson, this sense of duration is experienced in the mind (Kershner 59). Consequently, Bergson does not believe that a sense of duration is experienced in the outer world, where the clock presents time as marching forever forward and leaving the past definitively behind. In his 1907 *Creative Evolution*, Bergson writes, “my mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing – rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow” (*Creative Evolution* 2). The mind, in Bergson’s view, is filled with the past as it ceaselessly pours into the present. This occurs as an individual navigates a world that attempts to move his mental state forward along the road of linear time. Bergson acknowledges that time may not, on the surface, appear to move continuously when he writes that moments “seem to be cut off from those which precede them, and to be disconnected from those which follow” (*Creative Evolution* 3). His work with time, however, pushes against the notion of discrete moments that are separate from the past, and he

strives to express that it is a mistake to think of existence as composed of separate incidents. For Bergson, all moments are connected to one another in a fabric that creates the present.

Bergson's description of duration "implies a conservation of the past" (Lawlor and Moulard Leonard). While describing the endurance of the past, he writes that the past "grows without ceasing, so...there is no limit to its preservation" (*Creative Evolution* 4). In Bergson's formulation, the past persists into the future by building the present. Thus, because it does not vanish, the past continues to grow. Bergson provides a lasting image of his theory with the statement that "duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (*Creative Evolution* 4). With this, Bergson presents the past as a predator – a force from which humans cannot escape. He further emphasizes the unavoidability of the past in the present by explaining that "the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety...it follows us at every instant; all that we have felt, thought and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present which is about to join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside" (*Creative Evolution* 5). The past does not survive into the present only when an individual desires to remember or fails to move forward. Rather, Bergson stresses that the past preserves itself, biting into the present, independently of individual wishes to leave it behind. It follows humans and coerces them to acknowledge it. According to Bergson, duration is a menacing force that "leaves on [things] the mark of its tooth" (*Creative Evolution* 46).

Bergson not only writes about the behavior of time, but he also advances considerations of varied times. Bergson credits Einstein with bringing about the fundamental shifts to notions of homogenous time, and in his commentary on Einstein's theory, he writes, "The idea of assuming a plurality of mathematical times had never occurred before the theory of relativity; it is

therefore to it alone that we would refer in order to cast doubt upon the unity of time” (*Duration and Simultaneity* 59). According to Bergson, Einstein’s Theory of Relativity made possible the thought of a plurality of times to disrupt absolute time through its validation of individual perceptions. When Bergson considers this temporal heterogeneity, he describes two types of time: physical time and psychological time (Kuhlken 345). Physical time is objective – it measures outward events by the clock – while psychological time is subjective – it describes “time in the mind” (Kuhlken 345). Physical time is clock time and psychological time is inner time. These two types of time do not behave in the same manner. Inner time is digressive and nonlinear while clock time is orderly and linear. In the framework of inner time, there is not a clear separation between the past and the present. Unlike clock time, which divides the past from the present and leaves the past behind, inner time brings them together.

Einstein and Bergson developed their theories of time after the laws of thermodynamics had been introduced. Around the year 1850, Rudolf Clausius and William Thomson, Baron Kelvin, stated the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics (Wolfram). In the 1860s, Clausius introduced entropy to the Second Law as a ratio of heat to temperature (Wolfram). The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that “the entropy of an isolated natural system will always tend to...increase – in other words, the energy in the universe is gradually moving towards disorder” (Jha). This suggests that there “are irreversible processes in the universe” (Jha). The concept of entropy relates to ideas about time because it “imposes a direction on to time,” it presents “an arrow for time” (Jha). With the statement that conditions tend toward disorder, entropy and the Second Law imply the one-way, forward movement of time. Clock time, therefore, behaves according to the laws of entropy while inner time does not. The concept of entropy underlines



that the clock is a powerful force that relentlessly pushes individuals to the future. Entropy emphasizes that clock time is not simply linear but irreversibly linear.

When entropy's "arrow for time" is considered with Einstein's theories of relative time and with Bergson's ideas of inner time, a conflict arises – a conflict that *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* reflect. Inner time behaves nonlinearly and digressively: an individual's mind can move between the past and the present, and Bergson writes extensively about the fundamental existence of the past in the present. Furthermore, with Einstein's theory, each individual is justified in having his or her own conception of time that moves between the past and the present. These theories suggest that the past is within reach and available for recovery. However, the irreversibility of clock time implied by entropy presents a blockade. The present is filled with the past and individuals' inner time can shift to the past, but entropic clock time pushes them forward, thus preventing the recapture of the past. By imposing the presence of the entropic clock while simultaneously illustrating Einstein's and Bergson's theories, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* stress the impossibility of this retrieval of the past.

Einstein's and Bergson's thoughts are major components of the changing theoretical conception of time in the early twentieth century as it shifts toward a concentration on nonlinear time. Their theories not only influence scientific and philosophical thought, but they also influence the literary work of authors like Fitzgerald and Woolf. Commentary on *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* often highlights the degree to which new ideas of time permeate the novels, but this thesis demonstrates that, while reflecting the changing theories, the texts do not completely break with nineteenth-century perceptions of time. The novels do not ignore the theories that came before those of Einstein and Bergson even as they depict worlds that are filled with relative inner time.

## II. The Past in the Present

The narrative worlds in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* reflect Bergson's notion that the past is part of the present. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the action of the novel covers seventeen hours, but the time in the characters' minds covers almost sixty years of the past (Wright 355). Similarly, in *The Great Gatsby*, the time covered by Gatsby's mind as he recalls his past stretches farther than the time covered by Nick's summer with Gatsby. To outline these pasts, the texts move nonlinearly between the past and the present. The shifts do not occur in chronological order as the clock marches forward, thus paralleling the digressive, unordered movements of inner time. The incongruity between time covered in the mind and time passed in the outer world that Fitzgerald and Woolf depict highlights that inner time behaves differently than clock time. Characters' inner times can move backward to include the past while clock time only moves toward the future. This personal experience of inner time and its nonlinearity are supported by Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which turns the emphasis in the theoretical world from orderly absolute time to disorderly relative time while political shifts in time remain focused on standardization. By documenting Gatsby's and Clarissa's inner times, Fitzgerald and Woolf illustrate that the past is inextricably bound to the present, leading to my argument that their novels capture Bergson's emphasis on the endurance of the past.

Throughout *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby feels the acute presence of the past in the present, causing him to feel that he can take hold of the past. As Nick describes Gatsby's trip to Louisville after the war, he explains, "[Gatsby] stretched out his hand desperately as if to snatch only a wisp of air, to save a fragment of the spot that [Daisy] had made lovely for him" (Fitzgerald 153). On a train, a symbol of forward motion that mirrors the press of clock time and that represents the standardization of time that was decreed in part by the demands of rail

schedules, Gatsby reaches toward the past, highlighting the tension between the entropic progression and linearity of time on the clock and the digression and nonlinearity of time in the mind. The clock carries Gatsby ever farther from the past as he desperately stretches toward it; his inner time can shift to the past, but clock time blocks him from grasping it. Louisville is a space filled with memories for Gatsby. It is, therefore, a physical manifestation of the past in the present. “The streets where [Gatsby’s and Daisy’s] footsteps had clicked together...and the out-of-the-way places to which they had driven in [Daisy’s] white car” still exist in the present (Fitzgerald 152). Clock time has moved forward, but the past endures. Gatsby can physically visit these spots of the past in the same way that his mind’s inner time can shift to the past. With this trip and Gatsby’s lunge toward the wisps of the past that comes with its end, the novel presents a dramatization of durational time in a world governed by entropy. Gatsby feels intensely the past in the present, and Louisville’s existence as a physical reminder of the past only increases his sense of the past’s persistence. Fitzgerald underscores that clock time moves ceaselessly forward, leaving Gatsby to only stretch toward the past, but, despite the fact that he cannot successfully take hold of it, the past remains a presence in Gatsby’s life.

The green light on Daisy’s dock also stands as a physical reminder of Bergson’s ideas about the endurance of the past, and, in the same way that he reaches for Louisville, Gatsby “stretches out his arms toward” the green light (Fitzgerald 20). As he does on the train, Gatsby attempts to physically take hold of an irretrievable past. Nick reflects on the significance of the green light for Gatsby when he says, “I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock...His dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it” (Fitzgerald 180). Because Gatsby is close to the green light, he feels close to Daisy and, by extension, close to the past. Before he reunites with Daisy, the green light

bridges the years of time that separate them; the sight and tangible quality of the light gives him hope that he can achieve his dream of recovering the past. Daisy is present in Gatsby's mind, but the green light and the history-filled settings in Louisville cause her to be felt in the physical space of the present. Fitzgerald's use of objects and locales to bring the past into the present illustrates that the present is imbued with moments of the past that, like a city passing by a train window or a flashing green light in the night, appear to be within reach.

Ronald Berman's analysis of Gatsby's house in *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas* can be read as signifying that the mansion is another monument to Bergson's idea that the past is part of the present, regardless of the fact that Berman does not mention Bergson by name in the text (Berman, *The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas* 180). In Gatsby's house, there is "a high Gothic library," "Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons," and "period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk" (Fitzgerald 45, 91). These images of rooms filled with allusions to history lead to Berman's observation that "to look at [Gatsby's] place is to see objectified proof that the past has been incorporated into the present" (*The Great Gatsby and Fitzgerald's World of Ideas* 180). To take Berman's observation further, I argue that the presence of historical objects and reminders of the past reflects Gatsby's desire to latch onto ideas of duration in hopes of recapturing the past. Gatsby can be interpreted as a character who wishes to take advantage of Bergson's ideas about the preservation of the past in order to reconstruct his present in terms of the past, meaning that Gatsby's work to physically fill his house with the past should be regarded not simply as antique collecting but as a step toward this reconstruction. By combining the past and the present in Gatsby's house, Fitzgerald's novel once again illustrates Bergson's statements through physical pieces. Consequently, *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates that the past is part of the present not only through characters' shifts in

consciousness but also through physical representations of the past in the present. The physicality of Fitzgerald's depictions highlights the weight of the past – a weight that leads individuals to feel that they can recover the past.

Throughout the single day of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the past also enters, both physically and mentally, into the present. The novel references the past from the beginning as Clarissa sets out into the city, and Woolf writes, "What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air" (Woolf 3). There is an immediate injection of the past as Clarissa remembers Bourton, a place from her youth. She hears a sound from her past in the present, and it leads her to have a retrospective vision. By opening the windows and letting the sound wash over her, Clarissa "plunges" into the past. Furthermore, Clarissa always feels this shot of the past when she hears something that she associates with Bourton. Throughout the day, Clarissa, like Gatsby, feels the past in the present; her mind's inner time constantly reverts to the past while she traverses London. This type of regularly occurring dive into the past during a present moment is only possible under Bergson's framework in which the past is a constant part of the present.

Clarissa sees that the past comes into the present without warning, triggered by sights, sounds, and feelings. While contemplating the preservation of the past, she thinks, "For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter...but suddenly it would come over her...some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James' Park on a fine morning – indeed they did" (Woolf 7). The separation of distance and the separation of time created by the entropic behavior of clock time do not erase Peter from

Clarissa's life. As with all pieces of the past, he is preserved in the present and can easily resurface in her mind when her inner time shifts to the past. The consequence of this presence of the past is that Clarissa, like Gatsby, carries the pain of her past relationship, and Woolf explains, "She had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish, and then the horror of the moment when some one told her at a concert that he had married a woman met on the boat going to India! Never should she forget all that! ... It made her angry still" (Woolf 8). The past has the power to make Clarissa feel strong emotions in the present. The fact that Peter meets a woman on a boat that pushes him forward, away from Clarissa, accentuates the force of Clarissa's digressive thoughts: she cannot escape the past, even as the clock, like a boat on the ocean, moves forward. Like an object that she has carried with her, the past weighs on her mind.

The movement of Peter into Clarissa's present further reflects the continuity between the past and the present. It is stated several times that "Peter Walsh has come back" (Woolf 107, 118). Clarissa's "old friend" is a figure from the past who has come into the present (Woolf 5). In this way, Peter, like Gatsby's house and the green light in *The Great Gatsby*, exists as an embodiment of Bergson's notion that the past is part of the present. Rather than with objects, Woolf physically brings the past into the present with the movement of an individual from the past into Clarissa's present life. This intrusion of the past interrupts Clarissa's routine: "All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter" (Woolf 122). The orderly advance of clock time that is part of Clarissa's life is disturbed by a piece of the past, and Woolf sketches Clarissa's reaction to this injection of the past throughout the novel. Furthermore, the obstruction of linearity mirrors the movement of

inner time, which digresses to the past as clock time marches forward day by day. With Peter's visit, Woolf stresses that, rather than vanishing as time moves forward, the past becomes a lasting part of the present.

Given that Clarissa considers the connections between points of contact from her past and present, I argue that she exists as a character who understands the Bergsonian concept that the past flows into the present. While walking through the city and contemplating death, Clarissa thinks, "Somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive of the trees at home; of the house there...part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best...but it spread ever so far, her life, herself" (Woolf 9). Clarissa considers that one's existence does not end with death because an individual exists in other individuals and in objects that are part of one's life. She understands that her presence leaves a mark on every person and object with which she comes into contact – a mark that endures into the present. She believes, therefore, that the past persists into the present. As Bergson states, the present exists as an accumulation of the past, and Clarissa feels that individuals are preserved in this accumulation as time moves forward.

The shifts between the past and the present in *Mrs. Dalloway* occur as Woolf outlines a single day. In one day, Woolf expounds decades of Clarissa's past, thus illustrating that a single day in the present exists as a clot of past days. By filling a single day with shifts to the past, Woolf's novel aligns with Bergson's effort to disrupt the notion of an isolated day. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson discusses the fallacy of isolated moments as he explains, "There is no instant immediately before another instant...The instant 'immediately before' is, in reality, that which is connected with the present instant" (21). Bergson reiterates this concept in *Duration and*

*Simultaneity* with the statement: “Every duration is thick; real time has no instants” (36).

According to Bergson’s logic, a single day does not exist because the present is connected to the past; a day is not singular because it is part of a larger web of days. Through her use of the space of a single day to tell the story of the past, Woolf demonstrates that a day cannot be taken out of the context of the past because it is composed of past moments. James Hafley and Bryony Randall each allude to Bergson’s ideas without explicitly invoking them when they discuss the single day in *Mrs. Dalloway* and its paradoxical display of past days (Hafley 73, Randall 597). Building on scholars like Hafley and Randall to include considerations of Bergson’s ideas, I argue that by narrowing the present, clock time of the novel to a single day, Woolf is able to detail the past that leads to that day, underlining Bergson’s theory that the present does not exist independently of the past. The consequent exploration of the past highlights Bergson’s notion of the existence of the past in the present, underlines the profound effects of the past on the present, and reflects the idea that the past feels close for individuals in the present.

The worlds of *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are worlds in which time exists as Bergsonian flux, in which the past is always part of the present and not simply an entity that comes occasionally into the present when memory is triggered or invoked. Not only does the content of the novels reflect the existence of the past in the present, but the structures also highlight the concept. By telling the story of Clarissa’s present through stories of her past, Woolf makes clear the fact that Clarissa is composed of her past. Fitzgerald asserts the same fact about *Gatsby* through Nick’s work to explain Gatsby’s past as he narrates his present. Other novels function in this manner, given that narrative relies upon time for its unfolding, but in Fitzgerald’s and Woolf’s texts, the characters are explicitly, rather than merely implicitly, bound to the past. Both Fitzgerald and Woolf develop protagonists whose present lives revolve around the past.



The lack of chapter divisions and the quick pace of the narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway* also reflect the amassing of moments and lack of division between moments described by Bergson's idea of inner time (Kuhlken 346). Tony Magistrale and Mary Jane Dickerson's description of Fitzgerald's construction of time follows a similar line of thought when they state that "Fitzgerald superimposes one time upon another in order to invent a present through a vision of the past" (125). There is not a distinction between the past and the present in *The Great Gatsby*. Like in *Mrs. Dalloway*, they come together in the novel. Through the incessant digressions to the past that accompany Gatsby's and Clarissa's lives in the present, Fitzgerald and Woolf illustrate the inseparable tie between the past and the present. The references to the past generate the present time of the novels. In this way, Fitzgerald's and Woolf's novels mirror Bergson's idea that the present exists as an accumulation of the past.

The forms of *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* reflect the period's emerging theories of time. Fitzgerald and Woolf abandon the linear form because it does not acknowledge the collection of past moments that builds a present moment. A chronological, strictly linear structure without references to the past captures neither Einstein's nor Bergson's theories of time. Anna Benjamin's observation that Woolf works to illustrate "in words a time within which a moment cannot be isolated...but is a part of a continuity in which present, past, and future are inseparable and interpenetrated, thus rendering inadequate the measuring of time by the clock" can be extended to describe Fitzgerald's work in *The Great Gatsby* (216). Unlike what Benjamin suggests, Fitzgerald and Woolf do not completely desert the measurement of time by the clock as they depict continuous, nonlinear time – the nineteenth-century clock remains a powerful force in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* despite the fact that it is not the only type of time in the novels (see Chapter III of this thesis). However, it is clear that the authors also recognize

the need to represent the continuity and nonlinearity of inner time in order to accurately illustrate an individual's experience and understanding of time in the early twentieth century. Instead of flashbacks, the authors interweave the past into the present narration through disorderly shifts in characters' consciousness. According to Benjamin, the traditional flashback "misrepresents time" because it oversimplifies time and divides it into simple moments (217). By moving away from the flashback, Fitzgerald and Woolf display their understanding that the flashback does not adequately represent the continuity between the past and the present; a flashback portrays the past as something that occasionally interrupts the present rather than as something that is an incontrovertible and perpetual part of the present.

### III. Clocks and Clock Time

Fitzgerald and Woolf construct narratives in which inner time is a major element; in each novel, the protagonists are preoccupied with their own conceptions of time that shift fluidly between the past and the present. However, neither Fitzgerald nor Woolf loses sight of the power of the clock. Clock time may be an insufficient representation of the full notion of time given the changing theoretical landscape in the early twentieth century, but *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* suggest that it cannot be ignored while accounting for the new theories of nonlinear time. Both novels inject clock time into the worlds that they depict, stressing that individuals must recognize the press of the clock even as their thinking shifts toward ideas of relative and inner time.

There is an emphasis on time in chapter five of *The Great Gatsby*, during which the past and the present come together for Gatsby as he reconnects with Daisy, a figure from his past. The first portion of the chapter is filled with consistent mentions of precise times – “Eleven o’clock,” “Two o’clock,” “Half-past three,” “Two minutes to four” – that draw attention to the impenetrable march of the clock (Fitzgerald 83, 84, 85). Eventually, Gatsby comes into direct contact with the clock, leading Nick to explain, “His head leaned back so far that it rested against the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock” (Fitzgerald 86). This moment sensationalizes the fact that Gatsby’s mind is constantly focused on time. Moreover, as Tony Magistrale and Mary Jane Dickerson state, by bringing Gatsby’s head into direct contact with the clock, Fitzgerald sets Gatsby “within the human structure of time, defined and restricted by its parameters” (123). This brief moment of contact along with the chapter’s frequent markings of time highlight the power of clock time to govern individuals who focus on inner time. Fitzgerald stresses that inner time, regardless of its nonlinear quality, exists within a world that is bounded by and operates

according to the linear clock. After Gatsby apologizes for moving the clock, Nick replies, “‘It’s an old clock’” (Fitzgerald 87). Combined with the detail that it is a “defunct” clock, this reply underscores that clocks are associated with previous conceptions of time. With Einstein’s new ideas of relativity and Bergson’s ideas about durational time, the emphasis is on nonlinear time at the beginning of the twentieth century: there is a shift away from the absoluteness and authority of clocks. *The Great Gatsby* captures this shift as it illustrates the enduring influence of the clock, indicating that the text takes into consideration the new theories of time while maintaining the strength of nineteenth-century theories. The novel acknowledges the Theory of Relativity before eventually undercutting the weakening power of the clock that comes with the theory’s dissolution of a single time.

Before Fitzgerald fully establishes the force of the clock, the reunion between Gatsby and Daisy is a moment during which Gatsby’s dream of defeating the clock to capture the past appears to have the potential to be realized in the present. There is a chance that, after the reunion occurs, Gatsby and Daisy can begin where they left off five years ago. The clock “tilts dangerously” when Gatsby tells Daisy, “‘We’ve met before’” (Fitzgerald 86). With this detail, Fitzgerald illustrates the tension between the clock and the concept of “before.” A clock measures forward time, the time of the outer world; a linear clock cannot account for the past. Gatsby’s sense of the past – and the notion of the past in the present in general – clashes with this. His inner time, which is digressive, is out of sync with the one-way march of the clock. By giving Gatsby the ability to tilt the clock with his head, Fitzgerald creates a moment in which it seems as if inner time has a sway over clock time. Furthermore, as Nick considers the dynamics of the situation, he thinks to himself, “I think we all believed for a moment that [the clock] had smashed in pieces on the floor” (Fitzgerald 87). Nick’s observation draws attention to the sense

that the meeting between Gatsby and Daisy defies clock time. Because the reunion is a moment of possible retrieval of the past, it is dominated by inner time. For Nick, Gatsby, and Daisy, the intense focus on the past during the meeting seems to render obsolete the clock and its function as a reminder of present time. Within the space of two pages, therefore, *The Great Gatsby* establishes the tension between inner time and the clock while also depicting the hope – a hope that comes with an emphasis on inner time and its ability to shift seamlessly to the past – that one can smash the clock, resist clock time’s push to the future, and return to the past. By the end of the chapter, however, it becomes clear that the novel has built this hope only to cut it down with nineteenth-century notions of the authority of the clock.

After several pages of timekeeping, there is a deceleration and suspension of time in chapter five. When he leaves Gatsby and Daisy in the house, Nick says, “I walked out the back way...and ran for a huge black knotted tree, whose massed leaves made a fabric against the rain. Once more it was pouring, and my irregular lawn...abounded in small muddy swamps and prehistoric marshes. There was nothing to look at from under the tree except Gatsby’s enormous house, so I stared at it...for half an hour” (Fitzgerald 88). Although time is marked, this moment is distinct from the passing of time denoted throughout the chapter because there is not any anxious action associated with it. Time seems to slow as Nick does nothing but stare at Gatsby’s house from under the mass of leaves that protects him from the ceaseless rain, a reminder of change and clock time. During this interval, Gatsby and Daisy reconnect out of Nick’s view, making it seem as if their meeting is suspended in time because Nick does not delineate its progress. By describing the puddles in Nick’s lawn as “prehistoric marshes,” Fitzgerald further hints that Gatsby and Daisy’s reunion takes them back in time. The knots in the tree also capture the feeling of a lack of advancement in time by providing an image of circuitous entanglement

that is devoid of a clear starting point, ending point, or direction. After this scene, the chapter shifts from exact measurements of time to more abstract ones, such as “a few minutes,” and to less frequent markings of time (Fitzgerald 94). The result is that there is less emphasis on the clock after Gatsby and Daisy have been reunited, suggesting that their meeting exists in a moment of stasis – similar to the moment of stasis that Nick achieves by virtue of his shelter from the rain – thus standing against the forward march of clock time. For a few pages, it appears that Gatsby’s wish to quell the clock has come to fruition. By removing the clock to create this effect, Fitzgerald stresses that the relentless toll of the clock is at odds with Gatsby’s desire to submerge himself in inner time and control the passage of clock time. Fitzgerald’s manipulation of the clock highlights that clock time is the force that thwarts the realization of Gatsby’s wish.

As the evening winds down, there is a reference to the outer world and the push of clock time. While Klipspringer plays the piano, Nick notes, “All the lights were going on in West Egg now; the electric trains, men-carrying, were plunging home through the rain from New York” (Fitzgerald 95). This image of trains and the movement of life is in sharp contrast with the directionless knots in the tree and with the bubble outside of the press of clock time in which Gatsby and Daisy have existed since the chapter’s final mention of exact time. The chapter, filled with the tension and awkwardness that comes with Gatsby and Daisy’s initial reconnection, points to the friction between inner time and clock time. Through the removal of references to the reality of clock time during Gatsby and Daisy’s private conversation, Fitzgerald constructs a space that reflects early-twentieth-century theory’s turn away from an emphasis on the clock. The clock does not appear to be a force during the un-narrated conversation, leading to a sense that Gatsby can have success in working against clock time to capture the past. Nick’s observations of the outside world at the end of the chapter, however, mark that the remainder of

the novel extinguishes this hope with the assertion of the clock's power (see Chapters IV and V of this thesis).

Woolf, like Fitzgerald, highlights the entropic motion of clock time. Clocks – symbols of absolute, standard, and linear time – are a presence throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* as time is continually marked. According to Nathalia Wright, the clock strikes fifteen times throughout the novel, announcing ten different hours (355). While walking through London, Clarissa observes, “For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? Over twenty, – one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or walking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (Woolf 4). Clarissa's husband, Richard Dalloway, also notes the musical warning and the “irrevocable” hour as he enters Dean's Yard during his walk home (Woolf 117). By repeating the statement, Woolf draws attention to the perception of time passing. Clarissa feels that there is a pause in clock time before it moves forward. The first toll is “musical” and less menacing than the mark of the hour because the push of clock time marked by the hour is irreversible, a reminder for Clarissa of the current pushing her toward death. The warning that the clock is about to change is musical because of the anticipation of a new moment. During this change from one minute to another, an individual has a sense of being suspended in time. The actual marking of time, however, is irrevocable because of the one-way current of clock time suggested by the concept of entropy. The images of “leaden circles” dissolving in the air as well as other images of substances disappearing quickly – such as puffs of cigar smoke – that recur throughout the novel also point to entropy's implication for clock time (Woolf 56, 94). These images and their association with

the clock illustrate the ephemerality of the present moment, highlighting the unidirectional press of clock time that carries individuals farther from the past.

The clock imposes linear time and brings characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* to the present as they wander through London thinking about their pasts. Pam Fox Kuhlken describes the force of Big Ben's tolling by explaining, "In suspended 'moments of being' in the stream-of-consciousness narrative, time only seems to have stopped – whereas Big Ben is emphatically ticking...throughout" (356). The presence of Big Ben throughout the novel is a reminder of the force of the clock. It is a reminder that clock time exists with inner time and pushes individuals forward. During Clarissa and Peter's reunion, they, like Gatsby and Daisy during their reunion, occupy a space of inner time as their minds digress to the past. However, by observing that the clock remains a force during the meeting, I diverge from the work of scholars like James Hafley who, in *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist*, argues that this meeting between the past and the present "destroys clock time" (65). Clarissa and Peter are interrupted when Elizabeth, Clarissa and Richard's daughter, enters and when "the sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour stuck out between them with extraordinary vigour" (Woolf 48). Elizabeth – evidence of the reality of Clarissa's present life with Richard – and the clock – which imposes the present and linear time – interrupt a collective recollection of the past. Unlike Hafley states, the clock, therefore, is not "destroyed." By contrast, it is a force that has the power to terminate the meeting between Clarissa and Peter. Just as Fitzgerald inserts the clock into Gatsby and Daisy's reunion, Woolf inserts the clock into a moment during which it appears that Clarissa and Peter may have a chance to retrieve the past, underlining the lasting influence of the clock. The pressure of the current of clock time forces Clarissa and Peter to return their focus to the present and to move forward. After this intrusion of Big Ben, Clarissa calls out to Peter as he leaves so that he



remembers her party, but her voice is “overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking,” making her sound “frail and thin and very far away as Peter Walsh shut the door” (Woolf 48). Clarissa desperately calls out to a figure of the past as the clock marks the present and the inevitable passage to the future. The fact that the sound of the clock overwhelms her voice demonstrates the power of clock time to hinder an individual’s attempt to stay in a space of inner time and take hold of the past.

While Fitzgerald highlights the tension between inner time and clock time, Woolf ultimately works to bring together the two types of time. Inner and clock time come together as the clock interrupts characters’ thoughts of the past. When “Big Ben [strikes] the half-hour,” Clarissa’s thoughts shift from Peter to her elderly neighbor (Woolf 127). The clock – a reminder of linear time – takes her inner time from the past to the present. Furthermore, the interruption of Clarissa’s reflection on the past and the quick jump in thinking reflects the behavior of inner time. An individual’s sense of time moves between the past and the present while clock time continues to move forward. Peter compares the toll of St. Margaret’s clock to Clarissa’s heart and says, “It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life” (Woolf 50). The clock is a symbol of the irreversible current of linear time that brings individuals closer to death. At the same time, however, the sound of the clock brings to Peter a vision of Clarissa from his past. Thus, Woolf portrays one scenario in which the clock brings an individual’s inner time to the present (Woolf 127) and one in which it brings an individual’s inner time to the past (Woolf 50). With this interaction between the clock and inner time, Woolf links inner time and clock time.

Woolf constructs a backdrop framed by the grid of absolute standard time against which her characters’ inner times move. The characters are part of the outer world because they are part

of linear time and are influenced by the clock. Although Clarissa's thoughts often revert to the past, she does not ignore the present or the outer world; she is "part of it" (Woolf 5). My argument builds off of Liesl Olson's and John Graham's thoughts about Woolf's treatment of the outer world to highlight that the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* do not live exclusively in a world of inner time. Olson describes Woolf's work to bind her characters to the clock by observing that the characters engage with the outer world in the city of London, even as they focus on their own thoughts (Olson 43). Olson's analysis relates to Graham's idea that *Mrs. Dalloway* presents a solution to the issue of linear versus nonlinear time by creating a world in which the two types of time are linked in their connection to a common reality (Graham 186). Sparked by the clock's frequent tolling throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is an awareness of the existence of the clock that is not present in *The Great Gatsby*. Progress, movement, and clock time are part of Gatsby's world, but he does not recognize them in the way that Clarissa and others in *Mrs. Dalloway* recognize the clock, a denial that proves disastrous for Gatsby. Woolf's characters – characters who are preoccupied with the past and who live heavily in the space of their own minds – are submersed in a world of clock time.

Throughout the novel, Woolf uses the strike of the clock to shift the narrative focus between characters, another tool that allows her to portray the unification of inner time and clock time. In one instance, Woolf moves the reader from Septimus' mind to Peter's mind when "the quarter struck – the quarter to twelve" (Woolf 70). Similarly, the sounding of the "clocks of Harley Street" and the "commercial clock...above a shop in Oxford Street" take the narration from one character to another (Woolf 102). Clock time joins individuals, illustrating that clock time connects individuals' distinct inner times. Under Einstein's Theory of Relativity, in which each individual has his own inner clock, Woolf creates a world in which there are still

connections, with the outer, public domain supplying the unifying elements. Her work to bring together the two types of times underlines that clock time is still relevant in the face of new theories of time that focus on relative inner time.

With the existence of several distinct clocks throughout the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* acknowledges Einstein's Theory of Relativity. When Big Ben strikes twelve, Woolf explains that its stroke "blent with that of other clocks" (Woolf 94). Big Ben is the "official timepiece of London," but Woolf stresses that it is not the only valid clock in the city (Brown 23). Its toll is mixed with the sounds of other clocks. As she prepares for her party, Clarissa hears the mark of the hour and observes,

Here the other clock [St. Margaret's clock], the clock which always struck two minutes after Big Ben, came shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends, which it dumped down as if Big Ben were all very well with his majesty laying down the law, so solemn, so just, but she must remember all sorts of little things besides...all sorts of little things came flooding and lapping and dancing in on the wake of that solemn stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea. (Woolf 128)

The presence of several clocks – clocks that are not entirely in sync – challenges the notion of standardized absolute time and establishes the emergence of the Theory of Relativity, under which time is relative and different for each individual. By including clocks that mark dissimilar times, Woolf's novel addresses the shift from a theory of time in which the clock is absolute to one in which time is relative and there is no longer a universal time. St. Margaret's clock "undermines" the authority of Big Ben and the notion of a single valid conception of time by presenting a distinct account of time (Brown 32). Furthermore, this "other clock" that Clarissa hears brings together "odds and ends," highlighting that the conception of time in the early

twentieth century consists of a variety of individual perceptions of time. For Clarissa, Big Ben's time, which represents standard time, is solemn compared with St. Margaret's clock, which represents relative time, because she does not appreciate the reminder of the press of linear time. With its ability to be nonlinear, the personal time that comes with relativity does not signal the same unavoidable march to the future as standard time. In light of her fear of the future, this possibility of non-standard time that is materialized in St. Margaret's clock is comforting to Clarissa. By including the relativity of St. Margaret's clock along with the rigidity of Big Ben, Woolf's novel acknowledges both twentieth-century and industrial nineteenth-century conceptions of time. The recognition of the different theories gives weight to the text's demonstration of the endurance of the power of the clock by establishing the range of thoughts on time. Like *The Great Gatsby*, *Mrs. Dalloway* nods to the Theory of Relativity before declaring the strength of the clock. During a period in which neither science nor individual can evidence that there is a single standard time, the novels gesture to the changing theories but ultimately undercut them.

The fact that clock time is a force in *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, even as individuals in the early twentieth century begin to think in terms of relative and inner time, illuminates the discord between the theories of time. According to Nathalia Wright, the clock in *Mrs. Dalloway* restricts individuals: "the consciousness of the characters is not allowed to wander on freely in time and space but is recalled periodically by the confinement of a particular moment" (355). Similar to the work that Fitzgerald does by placing Gatsby's head in contact with the clock in chapter five, Woolf creates a narrative in which inner time is checked by clock time. With this, both novels illustrate that even in the face of a shift to the Theory of Relativity and to Bergson's ideas about durational time, clock time is still a force. Like Gatsby, Clarissa

and others in *Mrs. Dalloway* are focused on the past; their minds are filled with thoughts of the past. The chiming of Big Ben, however, is a constant reminder that clock time moves forward, taking individuals farther from the past, despite the fact that their inner time takes them toward the past. In this way, Woolf's novel, like Fitzgerald's, identifies the conflict between the theories of time: the past is felt in the present, but clock time and the irreversible forward motion of clock time suggested by entropy prevent the recovery of the past.

My argument thus diverges further from that of James Hafley, who refers to clock time in *Mrs. Dalloway* as "false time" that exists in opposition to the reality of time (63). With this idea of clock time, Hafley can be read as suggesting that the new conception of time as durational and relative obliterates any need to recognize the clock as a true, real, influential phenomenon. However, both Fitzgerald and Woolf, through their constructions of protagonists who struggle with the simultaneous existences of inner time and clock time, demonstrate that the clock remains a power with which one must contend. Fitzgerald and Woolf recognize the entropic movement of clock time as real and as an unavoidable part of life. Hafley's view that "true reality" is time that is completely in the mind (63) – which implies that true reality does not include clock time – neither aligns with Fitzgerald's stress on the tension between inner time and clock time nor with Woolf's integration of inner time and clock time. Both authors ultimately establish that reality includes the two types of time and that one must come to terms with their co-existence, resulting in novels that elude a radical break with nineteenth-century notions of linear time.

Fitzgerald's highlighting of the tension between inner time and clock time and Woolf's work to bring together the two types of time are authorial moves that complement their respective protagonists' mindsets. Woolf's presentation of the unification of inner time and clock

time underscores the balanced mindset that the novel suggests is necessary for survival in a world where the new theories of relative inner time exist with traditional notions of the entropic clock. Clarissa embodies the combination of inner time and clock time; she feels the past, but she is able to focus on the present, unlike Gatsby, who cannot reconcile inner time and clock time. Fitzgerald's emphasis on the friction between time in the mind and time on the clock works to stress, along with Gatsby's demise, that an intense focus on inner time is incompatible with the forceful movement of clock time. Each author's representations of the clock and linear time, therefore, contribute to their novels' ultimate assertions about an individual's ability to live within time. Fitzgerald gives readers a view of an unsustainable mindset that focuses only on inner time, while Woolf provides an image of a maintainable perception that allows for the coexistence of digressive inner time and linear clock time.

#### IV. Desire to Work Against the Push of Clock Time

Gatsby and Clarissa share similar feelings of antipathy toward clock time. Tony Magistrale and Mary Jane Dickerson's description of Gatsby's sense of time as the enemy, "a force of corruption that must somehow be surmounted in order to nourish and realize the ideal," can also be used to define Clarissa's view of time (121). Gatsby's "ideal" is a return to his past with Daisy. Clarissa's "ideal" is a permanent place in the present or a return to youth. Each of these scenarios, however, is only possible for Gatsby and Clarissa if they are able to elude the entropic march of clock time that Fitzgerald and Woolf maintain as a force in their lives. Through the novels' outlines of their protagonists' strong reactions to the clock and of the impossibility of this elusion, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* highlight the power of the nineteenth-century clock, revealing the misguidedness of the notion that clock time is no longer an inescapable, governing force.

As part of his quest to reclaim the past, Gatsby desires to work against the press of clock time. After the war, he takes an "irresistible journey" to Louisville to revisit the spaces in which he spent time with Daisy (Fitzgerald 152). Not only does Louisville embody the notion of the past in the present, as discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, but Gatsby's trip to the city also reflects his wish to obliterate the forward movement of clock time so that he can return to the past. He cannot resist the prospect of the journey to a place associated with his past because, in his mind, it is an opportunity to fulfill this wish by enacting a trip to the past. The text that immediately follows Nick's description of Gatsby's past trip to Louisville is a description of a moment in the present – a shift that demonstrates the swings in inner time while also stressing that clock time moves forward and pulls Gatsby from the past. A servant informs Gatsby that he is going to drain the pool given that the "leaves'll start falling pretty soon" (Fitzgerald 153).

Gatsby tells him not to do it because he has not yet used the pool (Fitzgerald 153). The seasons are changing and the clock is moving forward, but Gatsby does not want to admit the progression of clock time. His seemingly trivial decision to delay the closure of the pool underlines his desire to do any work that he can to construct for himself a world in which time does not follow the rules of entropy. Through a refusal to allow his servant to mark the end of the warm months, Gatsby creates the illusion that clock time is not forcing him day by day through the summer. Just as he does by taking the trip to Louisville, Gatsby makes a small, and ultimately useless, attempt to act against the unidirectional push of clock time.

Gatsby's routine hosting of parties is also an attempt to drive back the clock. Niklas Salmose writes that Fitzgerald's descriptions of "what happens several times in story time" create an "idealized timelessness" (75). In the context of Gatsby's hatred of the entropic movement of clock time, "idealized timelessness" implies an absence of progress. The parties are not only a way for Gatsby to attempt to see Daisy and to recapture his past with her, but their recurrence also creates an atmosphere in which time does not seem to move forward. Nick's account of the parties emphasizes the feeling of repetition by outlining the events that occur "every Friday" and "every Monday" (Fitzgerald 39). Furthermore, Nick speaks of the parties in the present and present perfect tenses even when they are not actually occurring and explains, "By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived... The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs... The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside" (Fitzgerald 40). The use of present tenses makes it seem as if the parties are still occurring, as if they are perpetually "in full swing." Nick's descriptions imply that each party follows a pattern. With this false impression of the absence of change, there is a sense that clock time is not advancing.



Additionally, Fitzgerald formulates dancing patterns that point to the party's function for Gatsby. As Nick observes the dancers, he sees "old men pushing young girls backward in eternal graceless circles" (Fitzgerald 46). The coupling of young and old highlights the passage of clock time – a forward passage that carries an individual from youth to old age. However, the backward direction in which the men push the girls mirrors the direction in time in which Gatsby desires to travel. The juxtaposition of these images reflects the unstoppable clock and Gatsby's wish to push against it. Furthermore, a circle is a shape without an end; forward progress is not made as one traces an endless circle on the dance floor, paralleling Gatsby's wish to eliminate his progress through time. By including the detail that the circles are graceless, Fitzgerald underlines that Gatsby's wish cannot be achieved without work that acts against the natural direction of clock time, accentuating that the clock remains a formidable force in the early twentieth century.

Like the parties in *The Great Gatsby*, Clarissa's parties and daily activities in *Mrs. Dalloway* are also highlighted as seemingly repetitive. There is "a shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party" because Clarissa's parties are a regular occurrence (Woolf 11). The description of what "would" happen at Clarissa's parties – "Mrs. Parkinson (hired for parties) would leave the hall door ajar, and the hall would be full of gentlemen waiting...while the ladies took their cloaks off in the room along the passage" – highlights their ostensible repetitiveness in the same way that Nick's descriptions of Gatsby's parties outline their regularity (Woolf 166). Similar to the manner in which the action of the men pushing women through endless circles at Gatsby's parties creates a sense of stasis, the gentlemen waiting for ladies to discard their coats at Clarissa's home produces a sense that time is suspended. It is as if the men are waiting for clock time to resume its forward march and take them from the hall into

the party. In both novels, the parties reflect the protagonists' desires to interrupt clock time, thus offering a view of the type of time – one in which there is little or no movement from the past – that Gatsby and Clarissa aim to create.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf further stresses the importance of routine to individuals in the present. As Peter thinks about his interaction with Clarissa, he observes, “Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame” (Woolf 49). Clock time moves forward as humans desire and attempt to work against the advance. With Peter’s thought, Woolf proposes that seemingly repetitive actions, such as regularly-occurring parties, help individuals feel that they are bracing themselves against clock time, which moves ceaselessly and uncontrollably like a sail flapping in a constant wind. Both Gatsby and Clarissa employ what they believe is repetition as a tool to root themselves rigidly in clock time and to take control of it. They each respond to irreversible clock time by trying to resist it through habit that, as a “rigid...skeleton,” grounds humans. Surface-level repetition, with its order and stability, creates a feeling of stillness and a suspension of clock time, leading Gatsby and Clarissa to a sense that clock time has slowed and that they have steadied themselves in its current. Thus, they enact the mistaken belief that Bergsonian duration implies that repetition is possible and is a viable technique to slow the clock.

The belief that repetition creates stasis does not align with Bergson’s views of time. According to Bergson, true repetition is not possible because “if everything is in time, everything changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs. Repetition is therefore only in the abstract: what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect, have singled out from reality” (*Creative Evolution* 46). In Bergson’s work, actions and events cannot be repeated because an individual and his surroundings change with each passing moment as the

past gathers in the present. Although the genuine replication of a moment may not exist, Bergson acknowledges that the performance of previously completed actions provides individuals with the feeling that they have repeated the past. However, Bergson believes that when individuals think that they have repeated an act, they are simply repeating a sensation that they have associated with the act. By creating the illusion of the reoccurrence of “the same concrete reality,” the actions allow individuals, such as Gatsby and Clarissa, to believe as if they have, through a recreation of the past, overcome the conflict that exists between the notion of the past in the present, which causes individuals to feel that they can seize the past, and the one-way current of clock time, which takes them continually farther into the future. This feeling of triumph over the tension, however, leads only to a false sense that one has control over clock time or has the ability to recapture the past. Because Fitzgerald’s and Woolf’s narrative worlds are ones in which time reflects Bergsonian ideas, the fact that the characters have beliefs about repetition that are in tension with Bergson’s views underlines the futility of these characters’ attempts to slow the clock and repeat the past, thus contributing to Fitzgerald’s and Woolf’s assertions of the authority of entropic clock time.

Along with the performance of routine actions that provide a sense of control, Clarissa immerses herself in the present to try to resist the press of clock time. As she dresses for her party, Clarissa thinks about the coming summer, and Woolf remarks,

Months and months of it were still untouched...Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa...plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there – the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass). (Woolf 36-37)

While sitting at her dressing table, Clarissa sees the future open before her. She envisions the months that are ahead but feels that if she can embrace the present, she will be able to hold onto a moment and render still the passage of clock time. Liesl Olson describes Clarissa's infatuation with the present by writing, "'Daily life' in *Mrs. Dalloway* functions as something [Woolf's] characters crave, as a natural reaction against the deformations of time" (49). Clarissa's feelings toward the present are a response to the theory of entropy and to the subsequent irreversible march of clock time. She desires to root herself in the present because she views it as a method to work against the changes in clock time that push her toward the future. While considering the June day, Clarissa's thoughts also reflect Bergson's idea that the present exists as an accumulation of the past. Her thoughts affirm the Bergsonian notion that the weight of the past sits atop the present, merges with the present, and creates an individual's life. Therefore, Clarissa's decision to "plunge" into the present is also a decision to plunge into the past that makes up her present. Rather than stay in the present and look forward, Clarissa wishes to stay in the present and look backward.

Clarissa's love of the present and desire to remain in the present is connected to "her horror of death" (Woolf 153). In the words of Molly Hoff, Clarissa possesses an "adoration of immortality" (454). Clarissa adores the idea of living forever to eschew old age and death. This adoration opposes the governing force of clock time that Woolf emphasizes through the retention of nineteenth-century notions of linear time's influence. Consequently, Woolf creates Clarissa as a character who must navigate a world in which her desires do not align with reality, allowing Woolf to eventually illustrate the shift in mindset that is necessary for survival. Clarissa's desire to impede the passage of clock time is explicitly stated when Woolf reveals Clarissa's thought that "nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long" (Woolf 185). Clarissa wishes for

every moment to endure because she wishes to stay in the present with her thoughts of the past rather than obey clock time and move forward into the future toward death. While contemplating the milestones that she has passed and the lack of significant events in her future, Clarissa has the sense that all that remains is “only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street” (Woolf 10). Without large milestones on the horizon, Clarissa faces only slow progress, and she does not want to be part of the collective march to death that is directed by clock time. Her stand apart from the march also points to the shift from unified absolute time to private, relative time, in which each individual’s conception of time is distinct. Clarissa embodies a response to the new theories of time that involves a preference for the world of relative time, where an individual is not restricted by a single conception of the clock.

However, Clarissa cannot escape the singular nineteenth-century clock, and Woolf illustrates the effects of the linear march that Clarissa dreads, highlighting clock time’s impact on Clarissa’s life. Woolf explains that Clarissa does not like the “solemn progress” because

she feared time itself...the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense. (Woolf 30)

Clarissa fears time because the forward movement of clock time brings her closer to old age and death. In her youth, Clarissa had a sense that moments were tangible; she registered intensely the nuanced sights, tastes, and sounds that came with living through a single moment. Time felt as if it moved at a slower pace while she was young because the vast future seemed to stretch and expand for her. She was able to feel the moments passing; she was able to note the “suspense”

that came before clock time moved forward (Woolf 4). As she grows older, however, she feels that she no longer possesses this ability to experience strong, time-stopping impressions. Woolf emphasizes that clock time quickly cuts away at Clarissa's life, making it difficult for Clarissa to intimately experience a moment before it passes. Just as Gatsby recognizes that time takes him from Daisy, Clarissa has an acute sense of the clock's work of pushing her, against her will, to the end of life. This awareness from both characters underlines Fitzgerald's and Woolf's work to portray the enduring influence of the clock. Throughout their respective novels, the authors outline the real consequences of the entropic clock on their character's lives and minds – consequences that motivate Gatsby and Clarissa to act against the clock.

In another attempt to mitigate the effects of clock time, Clarissa seeks connections because she believes that they will preserve her soul and allow her to live on in the minds of others. This belief relates to Bergson's idea that the present exists as an accumulation of the past; Clarissa desires to be part of others' lives so that she will be spread throughout that accumulation. To illustrate a response to the effects of the linear clock, Woolf explains that Clarissa strives to connect with others because Clarissa believes that the connection results in an attachment: it is "as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which...became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down" (Woolf 112). With this, Woolf dramatizes the marks that individuals leave on those with whom they come into contact. In Woolf's narrative, individual lives are connected, meaning that Clarissa's life disperses through time and space as her connections move about the city. Clarissa recognizes, however, that these connections wear down under clock time – the unending progress of which is signaled by the striking of the bells – and need to be maintained. In Clarissa's view, her parties

are “an offering; to combine; to create” (Woolf 122). Clarissa feels the simultaneous existences of people, and she throws parties not only as an act of repetition but also as an attempt to create and uphold the connections necessary for individuals to defy clock time and live on after death in others. Peter thinks about Clarissa’s beliefs and remembers her theory that “the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death” (Woolf 153). In the face of her fear of death, Clarissa uses the development of connections as a tactic to try to extend her life. She believes that the soul of a deceased individual can transcend time by attaching itself to members of its past life. In Clarissa’s mind, connections allow individuals to overcome the press of clock time by prolonging the survival of their souls after their bodies’ clocks expire. Although Clarissa’s belief is not as fervent as Gatsby’s, Woolf, like Fitzgerald, creates a character who wrongly thinks that it is possible to work against the clock. With this, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* suggest that the twentieth-century shift to relative inner time drives a flawed perception that clock time can be avoided.

Albeit for different reasons, Gatsby and Clarissa each have a strong desire to combat the one-way current of clock time. By creating characters who loathe the clock, Fitzgerald and Woolf emphasize the lasting impact of clock time in the early twentieth century – the clock would not be available for hatred if the new theories of time had rendered it completely powerless. Despite the fact that they write in an era obsessed with experimenting with time, Fitzgerald and Woolf hold onto the clock of nineteenth-century theory. Clarissa believes that the advance of entropic clock time causes humans to be “a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship” (Woolf 77). Peter’s thought that “time flaps on the mast,” mentioned earlier in this section of the

thesis, emphasizes that clock time is the force that propels the doomed ship, even in the twentieth century, when new theories suggest that the clock has lost its strength (Woolf 49).

Clarissa dreads the press of clock time because it pulls her toward death, while Gatsby despises clock time because it drags him from Daisy. Unlike Gatsby, however, Clarissa's driving motivation is not a desire to return to the past. In *Clarissa*, Woolf develops a character who would welcome a return to Bourton and to her youth, but, who, at her core, is focused on striving to remain in the present. Clarissa's survival suggests that this attitude is necessary for life in a world where inner time exists with the governing force of clock time. Although Clarissa's work to immerse herself in the present also serves as a futile attempt to prevent the passage of clock time, it is more productive than Gatsby's complete refusal to live in the present. In contrast to Gatsby, Clarissa can, in some capacity, focus on and accept the present. Gatsby's primary focus is a return to the past; the relationship with Daisy that he desperately desires only exists for him in the past. He believes that he can rewrite his relationship with Daisy if he can fight against the clock to defeat entropy and return to his past. Furthermore, Gatsby does not recognize the "doomed...sinking ship" that Clarissa sees. For Gatsby, the ship is not doomed. He knows that clock time has the potential to take him from the past, but he full-heartedly believes that he has the ability to keep his dream afloat by fighting the swell of the clock. Through Gatsby's demise, therefore, Fitzgerald suggests that it is not possible to defeat the nineteenth-century clock. It is these disparities in mindset between Gatsby and Clarissa that prevent Gatsby from surviving in an entropic universe and that give Clarissa the opportunity to endure.



### V. Gatsby's Monomaniacal Focus on the Past and Gatsby's Demise

Gatsby not only desires to slow the passage of clock time to retrieve the past, but he also genuinely believes that it is possible. In a clear expression of his confidence in his ability to achieve this goal, Gatsby replies to Nick's statement of "You can't repeat the past" by exclaiming, "Can't repeat the past?...Why of course you can!...I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before...[Daisy'll] see" (Fitzgerald 110). Nick does not think that an individual can repeat the past; he understands the governing logic of the push of clock time. As a consequence of Gatsby's hopefulness and ignorance of clock time's power, however, Gatsby ardently believes that he can overcome the clock. He believes that, with the correct actions, he can recapture the relationship that he had with Daisy before five years separated them, and he devotes his life to recovering the past. In the end, this devotion is Gatsby's downfall.

For Gatsby, the task of retrieving the past appears to be simple. While they are in The Plaza Hotel with Nick, Jordan, and Tom, Gatsby tells Daisy, "That's all over now...It doesn't matter anymore. Just tell [Tom] the truth – that you never loved him – and it's all wiped out forever" (Fitzgerald 132). Gatsby believes that he has the power to control the clock. He thinks that he can wipe out undesirable parts of the past, stop forward motion, and return to the past of his memories. At the end of his trip to Louisville, which takes place while Daisy is away with Tom on their "wedding trip," Gatsby feels that "if he had searched harder, he might have found [Daisy] – that he was leaving her behind" (Fitzgerald 152-153). As discussed in Chapters II and IV of this thesis, Louisville is a space that is filled with physical markers of Gatsby's past. If Daisy exists as an embodiment of the past that Gatsby desires, then his belief that he could have "found" Daisy in Louisville is a belief that if he had worked harder, he could have successfully defied clock time to recapture the past. With these beliefs, Fitzgerald constructs Gatsby as a

character who fails to recognize that the forward motion of the nineteenth-century clock still exists as an imposing influence, even in the early twentieth century as ideas of the nonlinearity of time are becoming widely accepted.

Whereas Alexander Fobes has argued that Gatsby fails to understand time “in the Bergsonian sense” as flux (91), I suggest that it is clear that Gatsby understands time as flux. Gatsby knows that the past is part of the present. He can feel his past with Daisy in the present to the degree that he believes that he can grasp it. Gatsby’s “greatest failure,” then, is the opposite of Fobes’ suggestion (Fobes 91). In fact, Gatsby’s conception of time is too intensely Bergsonian. He feels the past too heavily in the present and does not accept clock time as a commanding force that takes him away from the past; his blind ambition to take hold of the past is fueled by his Bergsonian perception of time and eventually drives him to ruin.

Bergson appears to have recognized an issue that comes with a devotion to the theory that the past is part of the present. He seems to foretell that the concept of durational time may lead individuals, like Gatsby, to feel that it is possible to retrieve the past when he explains that an individual’s “personality” is constantly changing and “by changing, it prevents any state, although superficially identical with another, from ever repeating it in its very depth... That is why our duration is irreversible. We could not live over again a single moment, for we should have to begin by effacing the memory of all that had followed” (*Creative Evolution* 6). Although the past is part of the present, it is not possible to relive the past exactly as it occurred because humans constantly change with time, and clock time constantly adds to the present. Thus, Bergson provides a warning that duration does not imply that an individual has the ability to repeat the past. By ending the life of a protagonist obsessed with the past, *The Great Gatsby* aligns with Bergson’s “predatory image of duration” (Kern 43). Fitzgerald’s novel presents the

dangers of centering one's life on the notion that the past is part of the present; the text illustrates the risks that come with believing that Bergson's ideas of durational time imply that an individual is able to defeat the clock to recover and repeat the past.

Even before the clear assertion of clock time's force during and after the scene in *The Plaza Hotel*, Fitzgerald hints that it is not possible to retrieve the past. After describing Gatsby and Daisy's first kiss, Nick recalls "a fragment of lost words that [he] had heard somewhere a long time ago" but then explains, "What I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever" (Fitzgerald 111). Nick cannot summon the past, evidence of his earlier statement to Gatsby about the impossibility of repeating the past (Fitzgerald 110). After the description of Gatsby's belief in recovering the past, Fitzgerald presents this ordinary moment of an individual's inability to remember a phrase that he once heard. The juxtaposition of these two scenes emphasizes the quality of clock time in the world of Fitzgerald's novel and in the world of reality: it is not possible to work against it to recapture the past.

Fitzgerald fully demonstrates this impossibility in *The Plaza Hotel*, the site of the collapse of Gatsby's dream. In response to Gatsby begging her to use words to wipe out clock time, Daisy cries, "I can't help what's past" (Fitzgerald 132). Daisy recognizes the hopelessness of erasing the passage of clock time. Furthermore, Fitzgerald's use of "past" instead of "passed" stresses the inability of humans to control the past, thus establishing the authority of forward-pressing clock time while underscoring the futility of Gatsby's belief that he can take hold of the past. Through Nick's eyes, the result of this crushing reality is that "only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room" (Fitzgerald 134). In *The Plaza*, Tom's presence kills Gatsby's fantasy of recovering Daisy and

the past. Tom is a physical embodiment of the present and of the change in Daisy's life that comes with the advancement of clock time, and he asserts himself as an undeniable barrier.

Although the past may feel close in the space of Gatsby's mind, it cannot be grasped.

Immediately after Nick describes Gatsby's desire for Daisy to erase the clock, Fitzgerald provides an image of Gatsby walking "up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers" (Fitzgerald 109). The remains of the party are evidence of the passage of clock time and the detritus that is left in its wake. After the earlier descriptions of the parties, in which they seem continuous and never-ending, this mention of the remnants highlights the senselessness of Gatsby's desire to overcome the nineteenth-century clock. Gatsby cannot wipe out clock time; the time of his and Daisy's separation is as much a part of reality as is the waste after a party.

After presenting moments during Gatsby and Daisy's reunion in chapter five (see Chapter III of this thesis) and during Gatsby's struggle in The Plaza scene in which it appears that time is suspended or that Gatsby will recover the past, Fitzgerald ultimately stresses that clock time is an imposing force that runs irreversibly forward. Nick's narration, with its shifts between the past and the present, reflects the nonlinearity of inner time. The scene in The Plaza, however, makes clear that although the past is part of the present, a strong sense of its proximity only fuels a desire for an impossible goal. The hopelessness of overcoming clock time is underlined in the moments after the group's gathering in The Plaza when Nick says, "So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight" (Fitzgerald 136). With this, Fitzgerald offers a distinct move to the future after being in a space in which Gatsby fights for the past. Nick's description of a drive toward death not only relates to the notion of dissipation that comes with entropy, but it also emphasizes the reality of the unconquerable passage of linear clock time.

Fitzgerald's emphasis on the impact of the clock only intensifies as the novel concludes. While describing Gatsby's end, Nick writes, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther" (Fitzgerald 180). As clock time pushes individuals forward, the once seemingly boundless future diminishes; an individual's sense of unlimited possibilities weakens as he moves closer to the end of life. However, according to Nick, Gatsby still has hope for the future. Gatsby believes in a future in which he will return to the past. Therefore, when Nick contemplates an individual stretching toward the future, he imagines Gatsby stretching toward the past. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the green light, with its existence as an image of the presence of the past, nourishes Gatsby's belief that this stretch against clock time will be successful, thus leading him to believe that the press of the clock is "no matter."

Through the use of "we" in Nick's observation, Fitzgerald recognizes that it is a natural human tendency – in an era in which new theories generate a sense that time has lost its rigidity and linearity – to believe that there is a future in which the past will be retrievable. In his final meditations, Nick follows this line of thought as he observes, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 180). The current of clock time presses linearly forward while nonlinear inner time draws individuals to the past, leading them to attempt to act against the current to reach the past and slow the progression of clock time. As evidenced by Gatsby's demise, however, there is danger in a monomaniacal focus on returning to the past and a blind hope that it is possible without an acknowledgement of unidirectional clock time. Jeffrey Steinbrink explains this reality when he describes the need for individuals to understand the entropic nature of the universe (158), suggesting that a denial or ignorance of the one-way

march of clock time that comes with entropy is lethal. Through its illustration of this lethality, *The Great Gatsby* firmly maintains nineteenth-century notions of linear time's command despite also incorporating early-twentieth-century theories of time.

The conflict created by Bergson's ideas, Einstein's theories, and entropic clock time comes together in the character of Gatsby. He feels the past in the present, believes that he can recover it because his inner time seamlessly takes him there, and as a result fails to accept the arrow of clock time. Gatsby is not able to survive in a world governed by the forward-motion of the clock because he believes that he can return to the past and does not understand the nature of linear time in an entropic universe. His deep-rooted desire to take hold of the past crushes him. Among other things, what "prey[s] on Gatsby," in the end, then, is clock time (Fitzgerald 2). With Gatsby's demise, Fitzgerald stresses that, although the past may be part of the present, an individual must be able to acknowledge the one-way movement of clock time implied by entropy in order to survive – a message that relies on drawing from nineteenth-century conceptions of standardized linear time. Relative time and inner time may be the prevailing theories at the beginning of the twentieth century, but, as Fitzgerald illustrates through Gatsby's demise and as Woolf illustrates through Clarissa's survival after her acceptance of clock time at the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*, one must still recognize the nineteenth-century clock and the linear movement from the past; one must learn to navigate the relentless current of clock time.

## VI. Clarissa's Acceptance of Clock Time

Woolf, like Fitzgerald, constructs a narrative that stresses that clock time moves irreversibly forward and that an individual must accept this in order to survive to the old age that Clarissa dreads. As Clarissa thinks about Peter's love life, Woolf writes, "The river...says on, on, on; even though, it admits, there may be no goal for us whatever, still on, on" (Woolf 45). The movement of the river mirrors the unending, one-way passage of clock time that carries individuals and pushes them forward, regardless of their inner perceptions of time. Following the same line of thought, Richard Dalloway recognizes that "there are tides in the body. Morning meets afternoon" (Woolf 113). Once again, Woolf highlights the notion that clock time is a current that "wrap[s] them all about and carr[ies] them on" (Woolf 138). With this language of currents, Woolf's descriptions of the river of clock time are in direct dialog with Nick's description of clock time as a current at the end of *The Great Gatsby* (see Chapter V of this thesis) (Fitzgerald 180). In these frameworks, clock time is sequential – "first one thing, then another" (Woolf 64). Both *Gatsby* and Clarissa occupy worlds in which clock time functions in this manner while their minds wander between the past and the present, but only Clarissa is able to recognize that "one got over things...life had a way of adding day to day" (Woolf 64). Clarissa understands that clock time marches forward and that an individual must allow herself to move forward with it, even as inner time digresses to the past.

The major shift in Clarissa's conception of time – the shift that allows her to endure – occurs during the party to which the entire day of the novel leads. When Clarissa first hears of Septimus' death at her party, she is startled, thinking, "Oh!...in the middle of my party, here's death" (Woolf 183). It is with these thoughts that Clarissa enters "the little room," a space that is distinct, in its representation of time, from the space of the party (Woolf 183). At first, Clarissa's

mind is overwhelmed with thoughts of death (Woolf 184-185). It is not until she moves to the window that her thoughts shift from death. When she parts the curtains and reveals the outer world, the little room becomes filled with clock time – there is the sound of the clock and the image of the old woman across the road getting ready for bed, both of which delineate the inescapable forward march of clock time (Woolf 186). The act of going to bed is “directed by mechanistic laws”; the action is set in motion because of the hour on the clock (Brown 31). It is an orderly routine that is tied closely to the movements of linear time. With these elements that stress clock time, the little room is representative of a reality in which the clock controls individuals. Consequently, Clarissa hears and sees clock time move forward and carry her toward death as she stands at the window. In this way, the sound of the clock and the sight of the old woman performing a routine dictated by the clock lead Clarissa to accept the work of clock time.

Although she attempts to convince herself of her love of the present in the early parts of the novel, it is not until the party and the scene in the little room that Clarissa is able to see that she must submit to the press of clock time. Before the party, Clarissa, like Gatsby, desires a state of existence that goes against the force of the clock; she desires a return to the past or a stasis in the present that is not possible given the forward motion of clock time. However, by going to the little room after learning of Septimus’ death, hearing the clock, and seeing the passage of clock time enacted in the old lady’s preparations for bed, Clarissa comes to understand the irreversible movement toward death as an inevitable consequence of existence in the present. This “embrace” of death means an embrace of the clock because, although death removes an individual from the clock’s influence, it is an event that comes as a result of clock time’s push to the future. The escape from the clock that comes with the finality of death is only possible given the clock’s



work to push individuals to the end of their lives. Moreover, Clarissa considers the news of death in a space that is filled with reminders of the force of the clock, heightening the moment's effect on her understanding of clock time. As Caroline Webb explains, Clarissa uses this moment "to define her present self, instead of losing that self in reviving the past," allowing Clarissa to "regain her vitality" (285). Septimus' death leads Clarissa to structure her thoughts around the clock. The sights and sounds of clock time in the little room increase Clarissa's appreciation of the present; Septimus' death leads her to "feel the beauty" of life (Woolf 186). His death functions, therefore, as an event that prompts Clarissa to accept her station in the march of clock time. By settling her thoughts of Septimus' death with an acceptance of clock time, Clarissa is able to save her present self by escaping an obsession with inner time and the past. Through an extension of Webb's statement to *The Great Gatsby*, I suggest that Gatsby is not able to "define" himself in terms of the present. He only conceives of himself in terms of the past and is consumed by his attempts to revive the past. While Clarissa accepts the one-way current of clock time and her place in it, Gatsby remains blinded by his nonlinear inner time and by his desire to recapture the past.

The news of Septimus' death at Clarissa's party is, as Pam Fox Kuhlken explains, an injection of clock time into a space that seems separate from the push of time, suggesting that the party is isolated from clock time (357). Although Kuhlken does not extend her analysis to outline the ways in which the party stands apart from time, I argue that Woolf highlights that the party exists as a space separate from the press of clock time through her description of Clarissa's event as "something now, not nothing since Ralph Lyon had beat back the curtain" (Woolf 170). The party is not "something" until it becomes isolated from outside forces. Ralph Lyon beats back the outer world by moving the blowing curtain, a reminder of the outer elements, change, and,

consequently, clock time. In its isolation from the clock, the party occupies a space of inner time. It is a space consumed with the nonlinear shifts in thinking that come with the past in the present, embodied in the presences of Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, figures from Clarissa's past. My argument thus opposes that of James Hafley, who claims that the party is not isolated from time. In contrast to Liesl Olson, Caroline Webb, and Pam Fox Kuhlken, he does not believe that the little room is a space in which Clarissa comes to terms with the inescapability of the clock. Because he does not acknowledge the ticking of the clock or the old lady's mechanistic movement toward bed, Hafley can be read as suggesting that the little room is an interior space submerged in inner time and that Clarissa "surrenders" to inner time (Hafley 63) – a suggestion that ignores the novel's presentation of the enduring force of the nineteenth-century clock.

Clarissa eventually returns to the party because she understands that "she must go back. She must assemble, she must find Sally and Peter" (Woolf 186). After being in a space of clock time in the little room, she enters a place that is, thanks to Ralph Lyon, devoid of reminders of clock time. The fact that Woolf sends Clarissa back to a space of inner time represents an acknowledgment of Einstein's and Bergson's theories. As a result of the acceptance of their ideas about time, the world no longer exists solely in terms of clock time. Clarissa cannot simply learn to live in the space of standard, linear time that exists in the little room, just as she cannot simply stay in a space of nonlinear time – a fact that is further evidenced by Gatsby's demise. With her movement back to the party, Clarissa brings her acceptance of clock time into a space of inner time, leading Woolf's novel to demonstrate that, in the face of the early twentieth century's new theories of time, one must integrate an understanding of the march of clock time into a world that contains the past in the present.

In the end, Clarissa is able to do what Gatsby cannot do: she accepts the entropic movement of clock time and is able to balance the past, present, and future. The final two lines of the novel read, “It is Clarissa...For there she was” (Woolf 194). As Caroline Webb has noted, the combination of present and past tenses points to the fact that Clarissa’s mind is in the past and the present (Webb 285). Although the novel ends with a commitment to the present, demonstrated by Clarissa’s triumph over death, Woolf also concludes with a nod to Bergson’s idea of the existence of the past in the present by bringing together “is” and “was,” thus highlighting the necessity of recognizing both the past and the present, both inner time and clock time. Inner time and clock time come to exist together in Clarissa’s mind just as Woolf brings together the two types of time throughout the novel (see Chapter III of this thesis). Unlike Gatsby, Clarissa does not simply focus on the past. Although she feels the existence of the past in the present, she is able to withdraw from it. Clarissa immerses herself in the present, acknowledges the existence of the past in the present, and comes to terms with the forward movement of the clock. The result is that she achieves a level of balance – a balance that is necessary for survival – between inner time and clock time. Through the illustration of this essential balance, *Mrs. Dalloway* underlines that individuals must accept that despite relative time and durational inner time, the linear clock is an undeniable part of the world of ordinary human life.

The novel ends without the reunion of Peter, Sally, and Clarissa, a final detail that emphasizes the reality that both Fitzgerald and Woolf outline – a reality in which the force of the clock impedes the retrieval of the past. At her party, Clarissa is aware of the presence of the past as Peter and Sally wait for her, but she is brought back to the present as guests request her attention, and “she must go” (Woolf 172, 176). Peter and Clarissa speak before the party, and

Sally and Peter speak at the party, but all three do not come together. This ending suggests that the past feels within reach but that an individual cannot fully capture it. In this way, Woolf's novel, like Fitzgerald's, acknowledges the discord between Einstein's theories, Bergson's ideas of inner time, and entropic clock time. Clarissa understands that to overcome the tension and reach a place in which one is no longer governed by clock time, one must die: "Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them" (Woolf 184). In Clarissa's mind, there is an elusive experience of life for which individuals strive. If an existence detached from clock time is framed as an unattainable ideal, as John Graham outlines it (189), I argue that it can be conceived as the "centre" that Clarissa describes when considering Septimus' death (Woolf 184). It becomes clear, therefore, that Woolf proposes that death is the only means through which an individual can escape clock time. Similarly, Gatsby's death at the end of *The Great Gatsby* aligns with Graham's observation that death is the consequence of an intense desire to live independently of the clock (Graham 189). Thus, in an era focused on relativity and inner time, Fitzgerald and Woolf construct narratives that stress the unsustainability of refusing to recognize the traditional influence of clock time.

Through the incorporation of both modern and nineteenth-century notions of time, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* explore individuals' attempts to cope not only with Einstein's relative time and Bergson's inner time but also with the clock time that dominates their lives. It is only by recognizing the real, unavoidable force of the nineteenth-century clock in each novel that Fitzgerald's and Woolf's messages about the nature of modern time become clear. Through Clarissa, Woolf presents an image of an individual who learns to live in a world that contains the past in the present while understanding the force of the clock. Clarissa learns to accept that inner

time and clock time exist alongside one another and that her life is part of a forward-moving current that takes her toward death. Through *Gatsby*, in contrast, Fitzgerald outlines an individual who neither reaches this point of understanding nor attempts to achieve it; *Gatsby* completely focuses on the past, his conception of the past in the present, and his belief that the retrieval of the past is possible. *Gatsby* concentrates only on relative time and the Bergsonian integration of the past in the present, and this, ultimately, is his ruin. The past is an overwhelming force in his present, but he is not able to reconcile it with the entropic clock so that inner time and clock time can peacefully coexist in his mind. He is restrained by the past, preventing him from growing in the present. With Clarissa's acceptance of the force of clock time and its unavoidability, Woolf offers a view of the mindset that is necessary to prevent a demise like *Gatsby's* in a world where nineteenth-century linear clock time is a power that retains its command, regardless of early-twentieth-century theory's emphasis on relative, nonlinear time.

### Conclusion

By placing *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* alongside one another, it becomes clear that responses to time were an issue with which individuals in both the United States and England struggled in the early twentieth century. This thesis has demonstrated that despite the presentation of differing attitudes toward the possibility of and need for victory over the clock, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* each reflect a preoccupation with the conflict between inner time and clock time. Together, then, the novels make legible a discourse around time that extends across national borders – a discourse that focuses on the reaction necessary for survival to the reality that the new theories of Einstein and Bergson do not render obsolete the nineteenth-century clock. This discourse reveals a wider twentieth-century battle to reconcile the behavior of inner time with the push of the nineteenth-century clock, which, as this thesis has shown, Fitzgerald and Woolf underline as an inexorable force.

The fact that both texts can be read as works that explore the tension between relative inner time and absolute clock time underscores that the theories of time in the fields of science and philosophy permeate other cultural sectors. Therefore, beyond its efforts to illustrate the ways in which *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* act against the trends of both literary modernism and twentieth-century temporal theory, this thesis also contributes to a larger argument about the importance of recognizing that scientific, philosophical, and literary work does not occur in a vacuum.

Through an acknowledgement of literature's inevitable interaction with other fields of study, distinct analyses of literary texts become clear and expose the issues and questions that define a time period. If the goal is to observe the ways that Fitzgerald's and Woolf's novels fit in to the conversations of the era, then explorations of the texts cannot ignore the theories outside of

literature that define the era. Reading *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* with nineteenth-century temporal theories and with Einstein's and Bergson's theories reveals the aspects of the novels that work against the trends of the twentieth century. Furthermore, considering the novels with the theories of time highlights the degree to which deliberations on time dominated intellectual and cultural communities in the twentieth century and illuminates that the focus on time was limited neither to the literary sector nor to the scientific and philosophical sectors. Only by bringing together various fields of study does it become evident that *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* participate in an interdisciplinary and intercontinental early-twentieth-century dialogue about the human experience of the past, the present, and the ever-ticking clock.

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