



## EMOTIONAL CARTOGRAPHIES AND FRAGMENTED SPACE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY*

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### Abstract

This study examines how emotional experiences are mapped onto urban space in *Mrs Dalloway*, highlighting the problem of fragmented spatial representation and its connection with inner psychological states. Although previous studies focus on stream of consciousness, they often overlook how space itself becomes emotionally structured and divided. This research aims to explore how emotional cartographies shape the perception of space and identity, and how fragmented urban settings reflect characters' inner conflicts and dislocations. The study draws on spatial theory (Henri Lefebvre), psychoanalytic concepts of subjectivity, and modernist narrative theory to interpret the relationship between space, memory, and emotion. The research employed a qualitative, interpretive method using close textual analysis. Key passages from the novel were examined to trace patterns of emotional mapping and spatial fragmentation. The findings revealed that London is not presented as a unified space but as a series of emotionally charged fragments shaped by memory, trauma, and perception. Characters such as Clarissa and Septimus experience space differently, reflecting their psychological conditions. The narrative structure reinforces this fragmentation through shifting perspectives. The study concludes that Woolf redefines space as a subjective and emotional construct rather than a fixed physical entity, thereby deepening the modernist exploration of identity and consciousness. Future research should examine emotional cartographies in other modernist texts and explore interdisciplinary links with urban studies and cognitive mapping.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Cartography, Fragmentation, Modernism, Psychological Space, Subjectivity, Urban Experience*

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## 1. Introduction

*How can a feeling be mapped?* This question lies at the centre of modernist literature, a tradition that privileges inner consciousness over linear plot development. Modernist fiction frequently foregrounds thoughts, emotions, and memories rather than observable physical action. Research in cognitive and spatial literary criticism demonstrates that modernist narratives are deeply concerned with representing mental and emotional experience as central modes of meaning-making (Tally, 2013). Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), a novel structured around a single day in London, exemplifies this modernist aesthetic. As characters move through the city, their physical journeys become expressive of inner states such as memory, trauma, alienation, and fragmented identity. Consequently, the novel invites readers to traverse not only London's streets but also the psychological landscapes of its characters.

This study examines *Mrs Dalloway* through the lens of emotional cartography, a critical concept that explores how emotions and mental states are mapped onto spatial movement. Traditionally, cartography refers to the representation of geographical space; however, within literary studies, the concept has been extended to analyse how space becomes emotionally and cognitively charged (Tally, 2013). In Woolf's narrative, London functions not merely as a physical setting but as a mental and emotional terrain through which characters process memory, reflection, and affect. This approach aligns with contemporary spatial theory, which views space as socially and psychologically produced rather than fixed or neutral (Westphal, 2011).

Although *Mrs Dalloway* has been extensively analysed through modernist, feminist, and spatial frameworks, existing scholarship largely concentrates on London as a symbol of modernity and urban life. Comparatively little attention has been given to how emotions themselves are systematically mapped through characters' movement across the city. As a result, emotional and cognitive cartography remains underutilised as a primary methodological framework for examining Woolf's representation of space and consciousness.

The narrative structure of *Mrs Dalloway* itself foregrounds this critical gap. Clarissa Dalloway's walks through Westminster trigger memories, anxieties, and self-reflection, while Septimus Warren Smith's disoriented movement through London illustrates how psychological trauma fractures spatial perception (Woolf, 1925). Moreover, Woolf's fluid handling of time—where past and present constantly intersect—creates layered emotional geographies that mirror the fragmentation of the modern mind. In this sense, space in the novel operates less as a stable physical environment and more as an emotional archive shaped by memory and trauma.

More broadly, this study contributes to discussions relevant to readers and scholars in postcolonial and Global South contexts, where urban spaces are often experienced as emotionally overwhelming and psychologically dislocating. By analysing how *Mrs Dalloway* transforms London into an emotional map, this paper demonstrates how movement through space reflects fractured consciousness and modern identity. Ultimately, the study argues that Woolf's novel does not merely represent urban space but actively maps the inner terrain of the human mind.

### 1.1. Research Problem

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* has been widely examined through modernist, feminist, and spatial perspectives. However, despite this rich critical attention, space in the novel is often treated as either a physical urban setting or a symbolic reflection of modernity. Consequently, the emotional and psychological dimensions of space remain under-theorized. In particular, critics have not sufficiently explored how Woolf maps feelings such as memory, trauma, and anxiety onto the movement through London. As a result, a critical gap persists in understanding how fragmented space functions as an emotional structure rather than a mere backdrop.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine how *Mrs Dalloway* constructs London as an emotional map shaped by memory, trauma, and perception.
2. Analyze how fragmented spatial movement reflects divided and unstable modernist consciousness.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. How does Woolf map emotional and psychological states onto urban space in *Mrs Dalloway*?
2. In what ways does fragmented space mirror the characters' fractured consciousness?

### 1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it redefines space in *Mrs Dalloway* as an active emotional and cognitive process. Moreover, by applying emotional cartography as a primary analytical framework, the research moves beyond traditional readings of urban modernity. Furthermore, the study contributes to modernist scholarship by demonstrating how spatial fragmentation deepens our understanding of trauma, memory, and identity. Therefore, this research offers a valuable model for reading literary space as psychologically charged, particularly in contemporary urban and postcolonial contexts where emotional dislocation is increasingly visible.

### 1.5. Limitation of the Study

Nevertheless, this research is limited to *Mrs Dalloway* and focuses primarily on textual and thematic analysis. Thus, while it provides in-depth literary interpretation, it does not offer an extensive historical or comparative study of Woolf's broader body of work.

### 1.6. Originality and Novelty

The originality of this study lies in its sustained focus on emotional cartography as a central interpretive lens. Rather than viewing London as a static cityscape, the research conceptualizes it as a fragmented emotional map shaped by movement and memory. Additionally, by foregrounding the interaction between space and affect, this study introduces a novel way of reading Woolf's narrative technique. Ultimately, it demonstrates that *Mrs Dalloway* does not merely represent space but actively maps the inner lives of its characters, thereby offering fresh insight into modernist subjectivity.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Modernist Consciousness and the Spatial Turn

Modernist literature is fundamentally concerned with representing the fragmentation of subjective experience and the instability of inner consciousness in the early twentieth century. Early modernist critics observe that writers such as Woolf, Joyce, and Faulkner deliberately rejected linear narrative structures in favour of fluid representations of memory, perception, and emotion (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1976; Childs, 2000). This formal experimentation reflects a broader modernist crisis of meaning, in which stable identity and coherent temporality are no longer tenable. Within this context, Virginia Woolf's narrative technique—particularly her use of stream of consciousness—foregrounds psychological depth and interiority over external action (Banfield, 2007).

However, more recent critical work suggests that modernist consciousness cannot be understood solely as an inward, abstract phenomenon. Instead, scholars argue that consciousness in modernist fiction is spatially embedded and materially situated, emerging through movement, sensory perception, and interaction with the environment (Tally, 2013). This spatial turn in modernist studies challenges purely psychological readings by emphasising how mental states are shaped by place. In *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), London functions not merely as a setting but as a dynamic structure through which characters' emotions, memories, and traumas are activated. As characters move through the city, shifts in spatial location coincide with fluctuations in emotional intensity, suggesting that urban space operates as an extension of consciousness rather than a neutral backdrop.

Despite this growing recognition of space as constitutive of modernist subjectivity, much of the scholarship continues to privilege interior monologue over spatial form. As a result, the mechanisms through which space itself structures emotional and psychological experience remain insufficiently theorised, particularly in Woolf studies.

## 2.2. Literary Cartography and the Production of Emotional Space

The emergence of literary cartography as a critical framework has significantly reshaped how scholars approach space in narrative texts. Moving beyond traditional geographical representation, literary cartography conceptualises space as imaginatively produced, symbolically charged, and emotionally inflected (Tally, 2013). Drawing on spatial theory, particularly Lefebvre's (1991) notion that space is socially and psychologically constructed, critics argue that literary spaces are shaped by memory, power relations, and affect rather than fixed coordinates.

Bertrand Westphal's (2011) geocritical model further advances this argument by emphasising the plurality of spatial perspectives within literary texts. From this viewpoint, places are layered with subjective meanings that shift according to perception and experience. Modernist cities, in particular, are frequently represented as fragmented, unstable, and emotionally saturated environments that mirror the disorientation of modern life. London has therefore attracted sustained scholarly attention as a symbol of imperial history, social transformation, and urban modernity (Marcus, 1981; Bradshaw, 2006).

Nevertheless, a significant limitation in this body of work lies in its tendency to prioritise historical, political, or ideological readings of urban space. While such analyses illuminate London's symbolic significance, they often overlook the city's function as an affective and emotional landscape. Emotional responses to space—fear, nostalgia, anxiety, and joy—are frequently treated as secondary effects rather than as organising principles of spatial representation. Consequently, the potential of literary cartography to account for emotional mapping remains underutilised in readings of *Mrs Dalloway*.

## 2.3. Emotional Cartography, Memory, and Trauma in *Mrs Dalloway*

*Mrs Dalloway* has been extensively examined through modernist, feminist, and psychoanalytic perspectives, with particular attention given to memory and trauma. Trauma theorists have read Septimus Warren Smith's shell shock as emblematic of postwar psychological rupture, while Clarissa Dalloway's reflections have been interpreted as meditations on identity, aging, and mortality (Caruth, 1996; Lee, 1997). These studies have been instrumental in demonstrating how Woolf represents psychological fragmentation and emotional disturbance.

However, despite their insights, trauma-centred readings often privilege temporal disjunction and mental rupture over spatial experience. Space frequently appears as a passive container within which trauma unfolds rather than as an active medium through which trauma is registered and expressed. Cognitive literary critics challenge this limitation by arguing that emotions are spatially enacted through bodily movement and sensory engagement with the environment (Tally, 2013). From this perspective, walking, perception, and spatial transition are central to how emotions are experienced and narrated.

Although scholars acknowledge that walking structures the narrative of *Mrs Dalloway*, few studies explicitly theorise this movement as a form of emotional mapping. The systematic examination of how Woolf inscribes emotional and psychological states onto the spatial trajectories of her characters remains limited. As a result, emotional cartography has not yet been fully developed as an analytical framework for understanding Woolf's representation of London.

#### **2.4. Fragmented Space and Divided Modernist Consciousness**

Fragmentation is widely recognized as a defining characteristic of modernist narrative, reflecting the instability of identity in the aftermath of war and rapid social change. Woolf's narrative method collapses temporal boundaries, allowing memories of the past to intrude upon present spatial moments (Banfield, 2007). Clarissa's movement through Westminster triggers layered recollections and emotional introspection, while Septimus's disoriented navigation of London exposes how trauma disrupts spatial coherence and perception (Woolf, 1925).

Scholars argue that such narrative fragmentation mirrors divided modernist consciousness, in which subjectivity is no longer unified or stable (Childs, 2000). Yet critical attention has largely remained focused on psychological interiority rather than on the spatial mechanisms that produce and sustain this division. The relationship between fractured consciousness and fragmented space—particularly the role of urban movement in expressing emotional instability—has not been sufficiently examined. This oversight limits our understanding of how modernist texts encode psychological experience through spatial form.

#### **3. Research Gap**

While existing scholarship has made substantial contributions to the study of modernist consciousness, spatial theory, and trauma in *Mrs Dalloway*, it has not adequately integrated these strands through the lens of emotional cartography. In particular, the construction of London as an emotional map shaped by memory, trauma, and perception has not been explored in a sustained and systematic manner. Furthermore, the ways in which fragmented spatial movement reflects divided and unstable modernist consciousness remain theoretically underdeveloped.

Addressing these gaps, the present study aligns directly with its research objectives by examining how Woolf maps emotional and psychological states onto urban space and how fragmented movement mirrors fractured consciousness. By foregrounding emotional cartography as a critical framework, this article contributes to modernist and spatial literary studies by demonstrating that *Mrs Dalloway* transforms London into a fragmented emotional landscape that embodies the complexities of modern identity.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive research design to examine how emotional cartographies and fragmented spatial movement operate in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Qualitative literary research is particularly suited to analysing textual meanings, narrative structures, and symbolic representations, as it seeks to interpret phenomena within their natural and discursive contexts rather than to measure them quantitatively. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue, qualitative inquiry aims to make sense of meanings as they are constructed and experienced, a principle that guided the present textual analysis.

#### **4.1. Research Design and Approach**

A close textual analysis approach was adopted, with *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) selected as the primary text. Close textual analysis allows for an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of a single literary artefact, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon under investigation and its broader context are complex and overlapping (Creswell, 2011). This approach was appropriate for exploring how emotional experience, spatial movement, and fragmented consciousness intersect within Woolf's modernist narrative.

The study was grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining spatial literary theory, emotional cartography, and modernist consciousness studies. Concepts drawn from literary cartography and geocriticism informed the analysis of space, while cognitive and trauma-oriented literary criticism supported the examination of memory, affect, and psychological fragmentation. Rather than treating space as a neutral backdrop, the methodology conceptualised urban space as emotionally and psychologically produced through narrative movement and perception.

#### **4.2. Data Sources and Textual Corpus**

The primary data for this study consisted of the authoritative text of *Mrs Dalloway* (Woolf, 1925). The novel was examined in its entirety, with particular attention given to scenes of walking, spatial transition, and moments where shifts in location coincided with emotional or psychological change. Key narrative segments involving Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith were selected for detailed analysis, as these characters most clearly embody the novel's exploration of emotional mapping and fractured consciousness.

Secondary data included peer-reviewed scholarly works on modernism, spatial theory, emotional cartography, trauma studies, and Woolf criticism. These sources were used not as objects of analysis but as interpretive lenses that informed the reading of the primary text and situated the study within existing academic debates.

#### **4.3. Analytical Procedure**

Data analysis was conducted through close reading and thematic textual analysis. The text was read repeatedly to identify recurring patterns related to spatial movement,

emotional response, memory, and perceptual fragmentation. Analytical attention was directed toward how specific urban locations—such as Westminster streets, parks, and interiors—functioned as sites where emotional and psychological states were activated and transformed.

The analysis proceeded by coding textual moments according to thematic categories aligned with the research objectives: emotional mapping of space, memory-triggered spatial perception, trauma-induced spatial disruption, and fragmented movement. These categories were not imposed a priori but emerged inductively through sustained engagement with the text. Narrative analysis was then employed to examine how Woolf's manipulation of time, perspective, and spatial transition produced a layered emotional geography within the novel.

#### **4.4. Interpretive Framework and Validity**

Interpretation was guided by an integrative framework that viewed space, emotion, and consciousness as mutually constitutive. Rather than isolating psychological interiority from spatial form, the study examined how fragmented consciousness was narratively encoded through movement across urban space. To enhance interpretive rigour, the analysis consistently triangulated textual evidence with established theoretical perspectives, ensuring that claims were grounded in both close reading and critical scholarship.

Although qualitative literary analysis does not seek replicability in the positivist sense, analytical transparency was maintained by clearly linking interpretations to specific textual passages and theoretical concepts. This approach ensured coherence between the research questions, analytical procedure, and interpretive outcomes.

#### **4.5. Scope and Delimitation**

The study was limited to *Mrs Dalloway* and did not attempt a comparative analysis with Woolf's other novels. This delimitation allowed for sustained depth of analysis and ensured methodological focus. The research concentrated on emotional cartography and fragmented space rather than providing a comprehensive thematic reading of the novel, thereby maintaining alignment with the stated research objectives.

#### **4.6. Discussion and Analysis**

This study has examined how *Mrs Dalloway* constructs London as an emotionally charged spatial field and how fragmented urban movement mirrors fractured modernist consciousness. Rather than functioning as a neutral backdrop, London emerges in Woolf's narrative as a living emotional cartography in which memory, trauma, and perception are continuously inscribed onto streets, parks, and domestic interiors. The findings confirm that Woolf's modernist technique transforms urban space into a psychological map, where external movement and internal consciousness intersect in complex and often unstable ways.

The analysis demonstrates that Woolf maps emotional and psychological states directly onto the urban environment, thereby addressing the first research question. Clarissa Dalloway's movement through Westminster exemplifies how space becomes saturated with affect and memory. As she walks through the city, present sensations trigger recollections that collapse temporal boundaries: *What a lark! What a plunge!* (Woolf, 1925/2005, p. 3). This moment does not merely signal physical movement but initiates a mental descent into past selves and suppressed emotions. London's streets thus function as mnemonic triggers, confirming Lefebvre's (1991) argument that space is socially and emotionally produced rather than passively inhabited. Clarissa's perception of space oscillates between public spectacle and private introspection, revealing how urban modernity intensifies emotional vulnerability rather than stabilising identity.

Similarly, the discussion of Septimus Warren Smith illustrates how Woolf's emotional cartography is deeply shaped by trauma. Septimus experiences London as a hostile and overwhelming spatial field, where every day sounds and sights become unbearable: *The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?* (Woolf, 1925/2005, p. 60). His spatial disorientation reflects the psychological aftermath of war, aligning with trauma theorists who argue that traumatic memory disrupts linear perception and coherent spatial experience (Caruth, 1996). Regents Park, conventionally a space of leisure, becomes for Septimus a site of existential terror, underscoring how Woolf destabilises fixed meanings of place. In this sense, London is not a unified city but a fragmented emotional terrain shaped by individual consciousness.

Addressing the second research question, the study argues that fragmented spatial movement in *Mrs Dalloway* mirrors divided modernist consciousness. Woolf's narrative structure—marked by shifting perspectives, interrupted thoughts, and abrupt transitions—parallels the characters' physical movement through discontinuous urban spaces. As critics have noted, modernist space is experienced as partial, transient, and unstable (Westphal, 2011; Tally, 2013). Woolf's technique of free indirect discourse allows the narrative to move fluidly from one consciousness to another, replicating the fragmented rhythms of city life. The chiming of Big Ben, for instance, punctuates the novel, imposing an external temporal order that contrasts sharply with the characters' internal disjunctions: *The leaden circles dissolved in the air* (Woolf, 1925/2005, p. 4). This dissolution symbolically reflects the breakdown of unified perception in modernity.

The discussion also reveals that spatial fragmentation operates as a critique of post-war modernity. While the city promises progress and order, Woolf exposes its inability to accommodate psychological rupture. Septimus's suicide is the most extreme manifestation of this failure, occurring within a society that prioritises spatial regulation and medical authority over emotional understanding. Scholars such as Bradshaw (2010) and Bowlby (2015) have similarly argued that Woolf critiques the modern city's disciplinary structures,

particularly its treatment of mental illness. The novel thus positions fragmented space not merely as an aesthetic device but as a symptom of broader cultural disintegration.

In line with other modernist spatial studies, this article confirms that Woolf's London is best understood as a relational and affective network rather than a coherent geographical entity (Massey, 2005). The intersections between Clarissa's and Septimus's trajectories—though they never meet—demonstrate how urban space binds disparate lives through shared emotional currents. Clarissa's response to Septimus's death, for instance, reflects a momentary recognition of shared vulnerability: *She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself* (Woolf, 1925/2005, p. 186). This moment crystallises Woolf's emotional cartography, where private consciousness resonates across spatial and social boundaries.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that *Mrs Dalloway* constructs London as an emotional map shaped by memory, trauma, and perception, while fragmented spatial movement reflects the instability of modernist consciousness. Woolf's representation of urban space challenges conventional distinctions between inner and outer worlds, revealing how psychological states are spatially mediated. By integrating emotional geography with narrative fragmentation, Woolf offers a powerful critique of modernity's promise of coherence and progress.

The study contributes to Woolf scholarship by foregrounding emotional cartography as a critical lens through which spatial fragmentation can be reinterpreted. It also extends spatial theory by demonstrating how literary texts encode affective and psychological dimensions of space. Future research could expand this approach by comparing Woolf's spatial techniques with other modernist writers or by applying emotional cartography to postcolonial or contemporary urban fiction.

### 6. Findings / Results

1. *Mrs Dalloway* constructs London as an emotional and psychological map rather than a neutral physical setting.
2. Urban spaces in the novel are shaped by memory, trauma, and subjective perception.
3. Fragmented spatial movement mirrors the fractured consciousness characteristic of modernist experience.
4. Woolf's narrative technique aligns spatial disjunction with psychological instability.
5. Emotional cartography offers a productive framework for understanding the relationship between space, affect, and modernist identity.

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