



AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF TIME IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NOVELS IN LIGHT OF THE QURANIC CHAPTER AL ASR

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Abstract: The concept of time is at the forefront at Virginia Woolf's novels. Being a characteristic in her works, the author suggests it as a major concern in both personal and artistic level of her life, and its careful involvement in the two is in fact what makes her concern worthy of further analysis. In this paper, I want to examine the passage of time in Woolf's novels in light of the Quranic chapter Al Asr. In this short chapter, God vows upon time and underscores the quality and importance of time as long as we are able to perform good deeds, hold on to the truth and advice each other on patience. In this perspective, the works of Virginia match in terms of the passage of time with the meaning of the surah Asr in the sense that as the times passes, the characters are constantly searching for meaning whether inside or outside themselves. This search leads them to the fundamental questions about life and death, and how much they are able to benefit from this search is what I will be looking forward to find out in this research. For this analysis, I will use Woolf's eminent novels *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*. The hypothesis suggests that the passage of time in Virginia Woolf's novels in light of the chapter Al Asr reveals the theme of the search for meaning and self-reflection.

Keywords: Time, search for meaning, self-reflection, Surah Al Asr, postmodernism.

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Introduction

The treatment of the concept of time in Woolf's novels is an object of study to many. However, I was curious to look at these novels through the lens of religious perspective, in this case, through the lenses of the Quran. In particular, the fact that God in His holy book has revealed an entire chapter in regards to time, it is one of a few reasons to deal with it in the study of our lives, and why not, apply that study in literature too. In this regard, we see that Woolf had a peculiar connection with time as well. This connection is both personal and artistic. However, the importance of this research paper lies in the examination of the concept of time through the relationship it creates between life and death, thus, emphasizing the meaning of the human existence in general. The employment of the Quranic chapter Al Asr in the interpretation of Woolf's works such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* demonstrates how religious perspective may help to explain the development of the topics in literature and open new ways of understanding them and life. From this perspective, the employment of the surah as a simple, short, divine formula to unravel the importance of time in literature and in life is highly significant in demonstrating the differences between religious and literature perspectives in dealing with the truth and reality. This intrusion of the surah in the interpretation of Woolf's novels strives to correct the misconception that the passage of time brings pessimism in the lives of people due to the fact that it approaches them slowly to death. When in reality, the topics that rise from the treatment of time in Virginia's novels through Surah Al Asr, such as the search for meaning and self-reflection, demonstrate that time brings about pessimism and loss only as a result of characters not taking action towards change and good deeds. This hypothesis of this research suggests that the passage of time in Virginia Woolf's novels in light of the chapter Al Asr reveals the search for meaning and self-reflection.

Methodology

The research will employ a postmodern perspective in its analysis. The paper will initially oppose postmodern ideas with those of the Surah Al Asr. Since the latter offers a specific and concrete formula in how to treat the concept of time (by making good deeds, help in truth and patience), the postmodern view claims the opposite; it offers no objective truth or reality for people to live by. The only point where the ideas of the two meet is the search for the truth, regardless of the fact that their outcomes in this regard



are clearly different. Thus, this research will compare and contrast the concept of time in two perspectives and reveal the result of this opposition.

Discussion

To start correctly with the analysis, let us have a view of the Surah Al Asr in the Quran:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

1. By *Al-Asr* (the time).

2. Verily man is in loss,

3. Except those who believe (in Islamic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, and exhort one another to the truth [i.e. exhort one another to perform all kinds of good deeds (*Al-Ma'ruf*) which Allah has ordained, and to abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds (*Al-Munkar*) which Allah has forbidden], and exhort one another to patience (for the sufferings, harms and injuries which one may encounter in Allah's Cause during preaching His religion of Islamic Monotheism or *Jihad*) (Hilali & Khan, p. 1108).

Having the surah in mind as a formula of analysis, the concept of time in Woolf's novels is treated in terms of the requirements the surah itself poses on man, and in terms of the results the analysis brings about through the hypothesis. On a more philosophical level, time in these novels also builds the connection between life and death, emphasizing the significance of both in creation of meaning. As such, this research seeks to explain whether in the three of Woolf's novels included in this paper characters help each other in the truth, in good deeds or in patience or not. In order to answer this question, we need to know what are the truths that the characters in the novel live by, what good deeds they strive to do and what are they asked to be patient about as well?

Assuredly, Surah Al Asr's definition of the three elements offers a religious perspective; meaning that the key to victory for a person lies in the practicing of the Islamic religion by meeting the three requirements mentioned above and the loss comes by neglecting them too. The last verse of the Surah Al Asr which asks people to call one another to the truth and to patience, is the stage of human completeness because the personal growth is meaningful only when it extends into the collective one (Salafiyah, 2011). In difference to that, Woolf's novels refute the religious perspective to offer



a suitable formula for a prosperous life. That can be seen in the author's personal life and beliefs in the first place, and the same is portrayed in her novels as well. The opposite of the concept of completion of the surah on one hand, is the fragmentation of the modern individual and the instability of meaning on the other. Woolf's and Murdoch's ideas about mysticism and theology are highly individual, and they both agree that the sacredness is something to be found in the everyday life, in which experience they believe lies the potential of revelation (Lazenby, 2014).

Taking this reality into account, Woolf's novels embrace the postmodern perspective which offers the possibility of multiple truths and realities that pertain to each person individually. The postmodern view of reality claims that the reality of life is changing, the "self" is changing, and the truth is a matter of social, cultural and personal perspectives involved. He also states that the truth is also relative and the reality that is created from the multiple perspective point of view can be seen as a collage; each person seeing various images in the collage, thus forming their own idea of the reality, and aiding in the creation of meaning (Bressler, 2003).

The Concept of Time in *Mrs. Dalloway*

In the beginning of the novel, the reminder of the passage of time through the Big Ben clock ticks' reveals Clarissa's recognition of the meaning of life. Similar to the short-term booming of the clock, so is indicated the flicker of the passing moments. Woolf links this passing experience with Clarissa's stillness as a predicament for the Big Ben strike, thus pointing out to the self-reflection as the medium through which she arrives to this understanding:

For having lived in Westminster- how many years now? over twenty-one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street (Woolf, p. 4).

In this paragraph, Clarissa's awareness of the passage of time makes her firstly conscious of the irreversibility of it, and secondly, reverses the attention from time to the self and to the humanity at large, for their delusion of the urban life. This awakening from the daily life happens as a result of



the ticking of the Big Ben clock, reminding Clarissa for the importance and shortness of the present moment, during which she is able to reflect on.

In the novel, Woolf employs the present moment to indicate beauty in the movement of the urban life of the city where Clarissa is walking. The entire natural progression of the urban life takes meaning and even adds beauty to life in general through this awareness in the first place:

in the below and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June (Woolf, p.4).

In the following chapter, Clarissa's fear of the impact of the passage of time makes her see the beauty of life in her youth as well as the diminishing of it as the years have passed.

But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, 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 (Woolf, p.23).

The passage of time on the other hand, brings about the loss of meaning for Peter as a result of Clarissa's rejection of him. This loss comes in the form of emptiness, nothingness and through the depiction of the sky imagery:

As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me (Woolf, p.36).

On another occasion, the sound of St Margaret's clock points out Peter's comparison of it with Clarissa. Similar to the rhythmic ticking of the clock and the termination of the sound in a sfond, there is an aftermath of sound which translates into something unknown but lasting, just like meaning. This something becomes normal and easy only with the coming of Clarissa downstairs:

It is half pas eleven, she says, and the sound of St Margaret's glides



into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be with a tremor of delight, at rest-like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming downstairs on the stroke of the hour in white (Woolf, p. 37).

Further, through the manifestation of time, Woolf links the search for meaning through the inclusion of life and death, at the predicament of Clarissa's death. The author identifies the term room for the moment.

But what room? What moment? Why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? Then as the sound of St Margaret's languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room (Woolf, p.37).

The theme of the search for meaning comes forth in both physical and psychological level in *Mrs. Dalloway*. For instance, Miss Kilman's stimulation from the Big Ben strike to move in a certain direction in the streets of London, is as strong urge as the calmness and order of the moment before the strike. The fact that the strike of the clock is unexpected parallels with Clarissa's uncertainty for Miss Kilman towards direction. Thus, the physical shaking to uncertainty paves the way for the internal one: *Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her, Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go-but where? (Woolf, p. 93).*

Next, the search for meaning in the novel many times comes underlined through the interaction between life and death. Characters such as Clarissa and Septimus have both a continual fear of death, yet they suffer by the hidden mystery of it. However, upon the arrival of death, Clarissa for instance regains her appreciation of life; while Septimus fails to do so. This implied meaning through life and death is contrasted with the beauty of the imagery and periods of time:

Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky, walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitebread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!-that it must end; and no one in the world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant (Woolf, p. 89).



Though the search for meaning is a work in progress in the novel, there are times when it is acquired too. For instance, Peter's acceptance of his unchanged feelings for Clarissa make him own them and extend over the emotional experience. This realization helps him establish the meaning of life in general, and feelings of love and beauty that he experienced in regards to that bond, fill a greater gap in his life, and suchlike he is able to overcome the suffering he so long felt in the same regard. In relation to time, the acquirement of meaning comes as a result of Peter's cherishing of the present moment and enjoying every bit of life too:

Life itself, every moment of it, every drop of it, here, this instant, now, in the sun, in Regent's Park, was enough. Too much indeed. A whole lifetime was too short to bring about, now that one had acquired the power, the full flavour; to extract every ounce of pleasure, every shade of meaning; which both were so much more solid than they used to be, so much less personal. It was impossible that he should ever suffer again as Clarissa had made him suffer (Woolf, p. 59).

The theme of the search for meaning in *Mrs. Dalloway* is in addition related with the theme of suffering. For instance, Lucrezia's suffering for her husband's inability to feel is a quest for meaning in the first place: *She was exposed; she was surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world, exposed, tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?* (Woolf, p. 49).

Answering the question on what truth characters live by in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we find that each have their own spiritual, religious truths for themselves, and in this novel, Christianity is the only practiced religion throughout. To begin with, Clarissa herself refutes religion and those who live by it. Furthermore, she despises those who practice it due to the system of practice, however, the more she escapes it, the more curious she is about those who do. As such, she devotes her life to other pursuits such as parties and other social events. The yearning for the Divine and for God and for something pure is at the core of our being. However, in designing this yearning, we devote it to other idols or things which belong to the lower world. Hence, in order to really attain the divine, we need to destroy these things, which we are in reality attaching ourselves too. Because of this false attachment, in an attempt to achieve God, we end up losing the sense of it in the first place (Lazenby, 2014).



Consequently, Clarissa seeks for the meaning of life in social gatherings and parties, even though they do not fulfil her spiritual needs. Other characters such as Richard, live their life with regrets of the unrequited love; Septimus on the other hand, is unable to find a stable truth as a war veteran and damaged both mentally and spiritually. He seeks salvation through death. In addition, Clarissa as well expresses some deep appreciation for death, but in Septimus's suicide, she realizes she is wrong and begins to appreciate life instead. Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth seeks loneliness and faith through befriending Miss Kilman. Therefore, each character experiences life in relationship with either people, events or concepts. As time passes, these characters develop the understanding for the concepts of love, death and survival.

The Concept of Time in *To the Lighthouse*

Unlike in other novels, in *To the Lighthouse*, the passage of time is portrayed in a more continual and poetic way, with a focus on periods of time, such as days, months, seasons and years. The arrival of night, for instance, brings about the theme of self-reflection. This happens with characters such as Mrs. Ramsay and Lily:

Yet as the night wore on, and white lights parted the curtains, and even now and then some bird chirped in the garden, gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself (Woolf, p. 36).

The awareness of the passage of time on other occasions brings about the contemplation about life and its meaning. Here Woolf emphasizes Mrs. Ramsay's idea of the meaning of life as a personal experience, in which no one else can intrude. Through the shortness of the moment, her spiritual privacy is what makes her a central figure towards which all characters are drawn. This way, Mrs. Ramsay's huge capacity to think and feel, even without being expressed impacts others who live with her:

Only she thought life-and a little strip of time presented itself to her eyes, her fifty years. There it was before her-life. Life: she thought but she did not finish her thought. She took a look at life, for she had a clear sense of it there, something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor with her husband (Woolf p. 43).



In addition, Mr. Ramsay's focus on a moment makes him realize the loss of meaning his wife brings in his life: *Yet now, at this moment, her presence meant absolutely nothing to him: her beauty meant nothing to him; her sitting with her little boy at the window-nothing, nothing (p.64).* This feeling then makes him question the reason of existence: *The truth was that he did not enjoy family life. It was in this sort of sense that one asked oneself, What does one live for? (Woolf, p. 64).*

Strangely enough, through the awareness about time, from the position of the search for meaning, characters in the novel, eventually acquire some sort of meaning and vice-versa. Indeed, the recognition of the greatness and the importance of the present moment, the meaning they acquire is everlasting, eternal, similar to the moment, even though the meaning is most of the time implied, and very rarely defined as in this paragraph: *so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains forever. This would remain (Woolf, p. 76).*

Through the passage of time Woolf also brings about the loss of meaning as a spatial experience. This can be seen in the decay of the Ramsay's house in the *Time Passes* section. The major part of the chapter deals with the loss of order, presence and abandonment of the house by its members: *something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps, had been hummed and danced to, but now, coming from the toothless, bonneted, caretaking woman, was robbed of meaning (Woolf, p. 97).*

With the death of Prue and Andrew in Ramsay's family, the author contrasts the loss of meaning with the coming of spring, contrasting also two different times (night and day) with stillness and chaos, thus pointing out to the loss of order and stability: *But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of the night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and thus terrible (Woolf, p.100).* Similar to Mrs. Dalloway, in *To the Lighthouse* also the intrusion of life and death, brings about either the loss of meaning, the search, or the acquirement of it. Woolf intersperses life and death, with night and day, then contrasts them with either negative or positive feelings, indicating the loss of meaning, the changing of the life's patterns in general:



How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. Mrs. Ramsay dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too-repeat it as she might, it roused no feeling in her. And we all get together in a house like this on a morning like this, she sad, looking out of the window-it was a beautiful day still (Woolf, p.110).

The search for meaning in *To the Lighthouse* is stressed also in Mrs. Ramsay's constant tendency to arrange relationships. With this moral responsibility, her role in the family is highly significant as it highlights the importance of life and death and of the future in front of her, as she indulges in other people destinies and matters (Gay, 2006).

Lily Briscoe's search for meaning comes naturally as long as she is indulged in her artistic activities of painting. For her also, the realization of the present moment makes her think about the meaning of life, as she is expecting her great revelation to end the painting:

What is the meaning of life? That was all-a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one (Woolf, p.120).

Interestingly, that revelation comes only by the end of the novel, when Lily's last line upon it marks her acquirement of the artistic vision. The quest for meaning for Lily comes also in the form of the search for a higher truth, and for an understanding of the reality she lives in. Lily's search for reality and truth are permanent, regardless of the passage of time and the changes it has brought with it, such as the death of Mrs. Ramsay (Gay, 2006). Answering the question above about the truth that characters in the novel live by, it ought to be explained that characters in *To the Lighthouse* in reality search for the meaning of their existence in different forms and actions. For instance, Mrs. Ramsay seeks her personal truth through contemplation and solitude; Mr. Ramsay seeks the meaning of life through intellectual endeavor; Lily, on the other hand, seeks personal fulfilment and meaning by practicing her artistic talent. Though the three of them seek the truth in different ways, in fact, Mrs. Ramsay in reality is closest to the religious truth, even though she fails to recognize it. The reason for her failure to transcend the mystic experience of the soul is the lack of factual evidence. She is prone to follow her spiritual and mental inspirations, but eventually they lead her to seclusion and solitude.



The Concept of Time in *The Waves*

The concept of time in *The Waves* manifests as an experience with a focus in the present moment and eventually, brings about the recognition of the sense of oneself. In reality, the latter springs from the first. That can be seen in Bernard's observation of the present moment and the world of objects around him, and as a result, in the recognition of his multiplicity of selves:

Every hour something new is unburied in the great bran pie. What am I? I ask. This? No, I am that. Especially now, when I have left a room, and people talking, and the stone flags ring out with my solitary footsteps, and I behold the moon rising, sublimely, indifferently, over the ancient chapel-then it becomes clear that I am not one and simple, but complex and many. (Woolf, p. 42).

Since in the novel time is observed in many units, such as moments, hours, days, months and seasons, similarly, the experiences that come out of it are various. In Surah Al Asr, on the other hand, time is one and definite, meaning that it covers all its manifold manifestation in one realm. In relation to it, Bernard's awareness of the present moment reveals his own contradictory nature and state: *Underneath, and at the moment, when I am most disparate, I am most integrated* (Woolf, p.42).

In the meantime, Woolf displays the futility and the loss of meaning for Louis at school, while trying to write and answer the teacher in the classroom. The author links the loss of meaning with the ticking of the clocks, indicating emptiness: *Now it is my turn. But I have no answer. The others are allowed to go. They slam the door. Miss Hudson goes. I am left alone to find an answer. The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone. The clock ticks* (Woolf, p. 11). Down the line, while Louis is drawing a figure, he is able to distinguish time from the activity, and see himself immerse and be part of the experience. For him, time is the opportunity to create the idea of the internal world of being. The fear of being removed from that experience and its entirety makes him feel fragmented. Though he cannot be one with time, he can observe it, and at some point feel participant in its passing experience.

Look the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join-so- and seal up, and make



entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it crying, " Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!" (Woolf, p. 11).

Through the passage of time, Rhoda on the other hand, is able to diminish the impact things have on herself. Yet, with this relief, she feels physically soft and penetrating, and suchlike, loses the sense of reality: *Month by month things are losing their hardness; even my body now lets the light through; my spine is soft like wax near the flame of the candle. I dream; I dream.* (Woolf, p.24). Seen from a postmodern view, the reality characters live by in *The Waves* is blurred and changing. But first of all, their ideas about things, themselves and each other are approximately the same as well. In turn, this conditions their view of time too. *There is nothing staid, nothing settled, in this universe. All is rippling, all is dancing; all is quickness and triumph* (Woolf, p. 25).

Susan's awareness of the passage of time leads her to self-reflection. For her, the only way to do so is to strengthen her sense of self and to enjoy her personal formation through solitude. Here Woolf points out the search for meaning, which is obviously found in the process of the formation of the self. Due to this finding, Susan then feels the capacity to give and the worth to be given:

For something has grown in me here, through the winters and summers, on staircases, n bedrooms. I do not want, as Jinny wants, to be admired. I do not want people, when I come in, to look up with admiration. I want to give, to be given, and solitude in which to unfold my possessions (Woolf, p. 29).

Due to the characters' awareness of the passage of time and the nature of life as changing, their perception of it is slightly negative. They prefer the opposite; that which is more lasting and sublime, such as the moments of revelations. Regardless of the fact that the present moment is the best time to live in, Rhoda for instance, feels herself attached to time, referring to it as monstrous: *This I say is the present moment; this is the first day of the summer holidays. This is part of the emerging monster to whom we are attached.* (Woolf, p. 35).

From this angle, not only the present moment, but time in general is an indication of loss and ugliness, since it points out to their inner cravings and division.



In contrary, Neville favors the present moment, as it provides her with the opportunity to recognize the beauty around her. This beauty leads her to the appreciation of life and the diminishing power of death. Here Woolf creates the link between life and death through the present moment, thus highlighting the experience of life:

In a world which contains the present moment, said Neville, 'why discriminate? Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, stepped in pleasure. The sun is hot. I see the river. I see trees specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past, through the red, through the green. Far away a bell tolls, but not for death. There are bells that ring for life. A leaf falls, from joy. Oh, I am in love with life! (Woolf, p. 45).

In addition, for Susan, the encounter of the present moment, leads her to her identification of the self with the world of imagery: *At this hour, this still early hour, I think I am the field, I am the barn, I am the trees (Woolf, p. 52).* Other Times, this encounter, makes her identify herself with periods of time, with light and dawn. This identification points out to the greatness of her inner self. As soon as she affirms this greatness, she distinguishes the loss of meaning which she cannot clearly define. In the grand scheme of things, Susan's identification both with the physical and metaphysical world is an attempt to make sense of herself in the world in the first place. It is a search for meaning, and for belonging in a world that is shifting and moving in front of her:

But who am I, who lean on this gate and watch my setter nose in a circle? I think sometimes (I am not twenty yet) I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on this ground. I am the seasons, I think sometimes January, May, November; the mud, the mist, the dawn. I cannot be tossed about, or float gently, or mix with other people. Yet now, leaning here till the gate prints my arm, I feel the weight that has formed itself in my side. Something has formed, at school, in Switzerland, some hard thing. (Woolf, p. 54).

Bernard's contemplation upon time leads him to the realization of the loss of meaning.

Time seems endless, ambition vain. Over all broods a sense of the uselessness of human exertion (Woolf, p.74).



Other times, characters in the novel recognize the beauty of time in terms of the existence of each other and the relationships they create with them. For instance, the presence of Percival in everyone's life is highly significant that Jinny is able to identify time itself with him:

'Let us hold it for on moment, said Jinny; 'love, hatred, by whatever name we call it, this globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again.' (Woolf, p. 80).

As much as *The Waves* is novel about time and the experience of life, it is also a form of the renunciation of death. Hence, the death of Percival is one on the most painful experiences for the characters in the novel. Bernard for instance, needs solitude, time and space to make sense of his death. *I ask and do not know, only that I need silence, and to be alone and to go out, and to save one hour to consider what has happened to my world, what death has done to my world* (Woolf, p. 85). The death of Percival is one of the major truths characters have to face in the novel, yet, they are constantly searching for major ones, which is an umbrella for the search for meaning. Initially, they are only able to make sense of their identities, and each other's as well as recognize pain and beauty. While by the end of the novel, characters such as Bernard experience greater understanding of life as a result of the passage of time. The end of his life makes him reflect on his past actions and wait patiently for death.

The lives of the characters are separate and unique experiences. Regardless of the fact that their lives are intertwined, challenged and shaped by each other, yet we find them solitary in the experience of pain or beauty or in the perception of time. In difference to the Quranic perspective, which requires from people to help each other in patience, in truth and good deeds, in *The Waves*, happens the opposite. The characters cannot help each other in the understanding of the world directly, but only through their mere existence, be it useful or harmful for each other. Similarly, they can either make sense of time in the same manner.

The discrepancy in the perception of time in *The Waves* with Surah Al Asr is that characters in the novel are mostly concerned with the idea of time, meaning, with its conceptual experience. In so doing, they neglect action and initiative to change, even though the imagery, the weather and the world around them in general, changes.



And time, said Bernard, 'lets fall its drop. The drop that has formed on the roof of the soul falls. On the roof of my mind time, forming, lets fall its drop. Last week, as I stood shaving, the drop fell. I, standing with my razor in my hand, became suddenly aware of the merely habitual nature of my action. (Woolf, p. 104).

Conclusion

This research paper has shown that the treatment of Woolf's novels *The Waves*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway* from the perspective of the Surah Al Asr reveals the themes of the search for meaning and self-reflection. Looking at the novels separately in view of this surah, it suggests that the characters in each novel are pursuing their own truths, and neglecting religious truth at the same time. By neglecting religious truth, in reality they are searching for another meaning of life by which they can live their lives. This meaning is sought in different periods of time, such as moments, days, months or even years of life, yet it is closest to be found in the awareness about the present moment.

In this perspective, the misinterpretation that the passage of time brings about pessimism in the lives of people is corrected. Characters in the novels that are corpus of this study experience emptiness and suffering due to the lingering in the past and not taking any concrete action towards change. Their emptiness linked with the passage of time comes as a result of their overthinking, flashbacks and memories. Another reason for their pessimism is also in their dealings with the matters of the nature of this world. Since Surah Al Asr points out to both the people who are in loss and those who are victorious in the way they approach time, the lack of good deeds in the lives of the characters in Woolf's novels creates emptiness and lethargy, from which they have difficulty escaping. Regardless of the fact that they have their own personal truths, they are not sufficient to grant them gain, since they are secondary. As a result, we see them posing questions about life and death, about the meaning of life, while questioning their everyday actions.

In contrast to the interpretation of the Quranic perspective, the employment of the postmodern one in this research has shown that the variety of truths and realities in essence it is not wrong, but the abandonment of the religious truth causes disorder and chaos in the construction of the realities. As the works of Woolf suggest, the closest characters are able to acquire spiritual fulfilment is through contemplation and meditation. Their attempts to negate the existence of God in the restoration of the world are



many. These attempts eventually consume themselves and then comes forth the loss of meaning as well as the search for it.

In addition, the theme of the self-reflection is frequent in the three novels too. The passage of time brings about change, aging and death in the lives of the characters. When facing these unfortunate changes, they shift their perspective from the world and turn towards themselves. At this point, both the Quranic perspective and the postmodern one meet since both Surah Al Asr and the literary perspective position the self in relation to something else. While Quran positions man towards the truth, good deeds, faith and patience, the latter opens up the possibilities for the man to see his perspective but to always recognize that the others' may be different. In this case, the approaches differ in their narrow direction, as the Quran leads to the concrete unchanged religious truth which can be strengthened through action; while the latter leads to various truths which depend on various personal, cultural standards and which can always experience change or modification. All in all, the variety of truths and meanings and realities in Woolf's novels only points out to the search for the real truth which is embedded deep in the human consciousness. Yet for that consciousness to be awakened, there needs to be action, seeking, sincerity and an ultimate surrender of the man towards the light of the great religious Islamic truth.

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