**Henri Bergson’s Durée and *Mrs. Dalloway***

**First, Let’s Go Through the Handout, “Time in Literature,” Especially Page 2**

In sum:

**Intellectual framework:** Decline of faith in historical progress (e.g., Nietzsche warns in 1880s of West’s tendency to divinize history—a sense all thing progress linearly to one great goal, e.g. Revelations). *Characters and events associated with linear or “clock” time: Bradshaw (time=money); Richard (time obliterates love); and history (WWI shook faith that all things work to one great goal).*

**Influence on modernists**: They react against linear historical time and explore other forms of time, such as:

**a) Bergsonian durée** (Engl: “duration”)--something intuited by Romantic poets and exploited by modernist writers like Woolf. [Go over romantic paradigm in class]

Example from *Mrs. Dalloway*—fluid movement between linear time and durée. In this case, durée is framed by linear time events, “pushing through swinging doors” and “as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar” and “oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!”:

Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry’s the florists.

She advanced, light, tall, very upright, to be greeted at once by button-faced Miss Pym, whose hands were always bright red, as if they had been stood in cold water with the flowers.

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes — so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale — as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer’s day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the

moment between six and seven when every flower — roses, carnations, irises, lilac — glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the misty beds; and how she loved the grey-white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when — oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!

“Dear, those motor cars,” said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars, those tyres of motor cars, were all HER fault.

*Characters associated with durée or “psychological” time: musings and memories of Clarissa, Peter, and Septimus.*

**b) Circular notions of time** (e.g. Freud and Jung show that humans continually reenact mythic archetypes).

Example from *Mrs. Dalloway*—*Character associated with this: the old woman and her song about past love.* Note words like “without…beginning or end,” “eternal breeze,” and “love which has lasted a million years.”

A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

ee um fah um so

foo swee too eem oo —

the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent’s Park Tube station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree forever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches

singing

ee um fah um so

foo swee too eem oo

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

Through all ages — when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the battered woman — for she wore a skirt — with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love — love which has lasted a million years…

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**Now, the exercise:**

Time: 15-20 minutes.

Task: In the manner of Woolf, write a narrative that begins in linear narrative time, then dives into durée in the sensibilities of a character or characters, then finds its way back to linear narrative time. **Bonus**: If the spirit moves, work into your narrative a moment or moments of circular time.

We’ll read some of these in class.