Landscape Of London In Mrs Dalloway

Woolf perfectly captures London in the 1920s in light of this comment discussing how Woolf captures the landscape of London in the Opening Pages of Mrs Dalloway.

At the heart of Mrs. Dalloway is its setting. It's the backdrop for the journey that Clarissa Dalloway and a whole host of other characters take us on. London in the '20s is a distinct time. While there was a great deal of opulence and wealth (themes that are evident in other literature of the time such as the Great Gatsby which conveys the life of the wealthy remarkably well similar to how Mrs Dalloway comments on class.) Towards the end of the century, the country was hit by the wall street crash and the great depression. Which ultimately led to a very different end to the decade than the way in which it began.

One way in which Woolf explores the landscape of London is through her use of detail in relation to certain aspects of London for example, the copious use of London landmarks and roads. The use of these details helps to capture a sense of London as a city at the time. For example, not only are there references to street names which track Dalloway's journey, 'Piccadilly' 'Bond Street ' but also areas of Westminster which give the novel a real grounding in London. This continual reference to where she is in London not only enables the reader a deeper insight into her world but has the additional impact of giving the impression of London as being a bustling busy city. The rapid dropping in of place names at times feels slightly like a bombardment and could to some readers feel slightly overwhelming. I think this speaks to a greater idea that was present in the London society of the time. London was an overwhelming place to be especially with the invention of cars and them being more widely available. London's streets were rapidly becoming busier. Additionally, life was just beginning to begin again post-war and there is a sense of overwhelmingness about that too.

Another example of this is in a section from page 7 which is in parentheses. How June is personified in this extract creates a feeling of London that you are hard-pressed to find anywhere else. Especially in the '20s when climate change was less of an issue you would have had a very distinct summer season and June would have been stunning as it would have had all of the qualities of the summer months without being outrageously hot. Additionally, the fact that June in particular is being drawn attention to allows the reader to become acutely aware of the changing seasons. This not only feeds into the much wider-reaching theme of time present throughout the novel but also allows there to be a feeling of 'turning over a new leaf ' in London. The new season allows for new starts in life. More widely the section that this line is from is incredibly important for the balance of the description of the novel. Due to the employment of parentheses, a grammatical technique which is striking on the page, Woolf interrupts her reader with a description of the London Scene that exists around her characters. The use of descriptions of natural movement -'drawn out every leaf', 'waves of that air in the park' The idea of waves appears to be a recurring motif in Mrs Dalloway. Water and waves regularly wash over events and thoughts to name but a few is something that Clarissa responds to Joyfully. However, while this image seems joyful at first there is a weight to the description with a mention of the war in the quote ' messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty'' The mention of the war is only brief in this section and this essay will go on to elaborate on the theme of war more broadly in the latter half but it is important to touch on this mention. The

addition of this line makes it feel as though it is being swept up in the movements of the world, it is not dwelled on for too long yet a reader in any era can surely pick up the subtle reference. On the one hand, the war is ingrained into the very movements of the city. It is such a deep-seated idea that it almost feels as though we may never be rid of it. Especially with the way that Dalloway continually contains small references to it. On the other hand (in this description at least) nature seems to win out and give hope and optimism to the London residents. This idea is one that applies to all of London at the time and the use of natural imagery provides a stark contrast between the two juxtaposing ideas, which may have been used to highlight the opposites between war and nature. This is an idea that was very topical as people would still have been feeling the effects of the war.

Additionally, Woolf's references to how long Dalloway has lived in Westminster give her authority and relevance to comment on the town in a way that we would not feel from a newcomer to the town. Mrs Dalloway is referred to as having lived in Westminster for 'how many years now? 20 ' This allows her to have a sense of ownership of the city as well as this allows the reader to be entranced by her journey as if they are on their very own tour of London.

London in the '20s was a time of great excitement. And that is seen throughout the beginning of Mrs Dalloway. One way in which Woolf conveys this is through her use of Long sentences. For example on page 14 with the majority of the first paragraph being one sentence. It is almost as though Dalloway can't contain her excitement so much as include all of these details. The stream of consciousness style helps with this. We can see a real insight into Mrs Dalloway's world. This would have been very true of all of London at the time who would have been excited about their futures post-war. Another way in which this joyful enjoyment of life is conveyed is through the explanatory nature of Dalloway's language. For example ' what a lark! What a plunge!' These explanations have a real feel of excitement. The word 'plunge' bit only playing into the wider waves metaphor throughout the novel but also giving the connotations of complete submerging. perhaps this could be to convey the idea of a complete and fulfilled enjoyment, especially with the connotations of 'lark' being of joyful exuberance.

Another way in which Woolf conveys the landscape of London is through her use of technology in the text. In the '20s London is a time full of new inventions. It is important to remember that cars were not all that common and as such were still something to marvel at. Additionally, it could be commented that London was on a precipice of change. At the time it was exciting and was thought to be the new dawn of London however looking back with historical context one knows that the wall street crash will hit at the end of the decade after Churchill's return to the gold standard. However. that being said it does not take away from this idea of London as a city holding its breath. This idea is evident in the quote, ' Clarissa was positive, a particular hush or solemnity; an indescribable pause; suspense. ' This quote has wonderful connotations of suspense or almost a pause on London. This may have been a feeling at the time. This idea that everything is so wonderful that reality has been paused. The use of commas and semicolons in this extract not only allows a physical pause in contrast to the metaphorical one it also is an example of how many modernist writers were writing. Perhaps most aptly summed up by this quote from a critical article on Mrs Dalloway as the modernist style being ' broken, choppy' the critic then goes on to say that 'sentences are rapped out as if on a telegraph instrument' this idea is very suitable for this quotation. The punctuation gives the sentence a broken disjointed feel about it. This may be because people know that this pause cannot go on forever.

Big Ben. Perhaps the most eye-catching, distinctive aspect of London. Known by tourists around the world. Big Ben could be seen in this novel as a symbol of England and its might. Throughout the novel, big ben sounds out the hour relentlessly ensuring the passage of time is continual throughout. The awareness of eventual death is always palpable. Ultimately, Big Ben is a clock so continues to dispassionately mark the endless progression of time, which waits for no one. Additionally, it could also be argued that, as Big Ben is part of Westminster palace it could act as a symbol of tradition and conservatism, the attempt to pretend that the war and modern life haven't changed anything. The striking of the clock acts as one of the main narrative dividers in this stream of consciousness novel and interrupts characters' thoughts and actions, with 'leaden circles dissolved in the air .' At this point in the novel, the inclusion of Big Ben is done in very short sentences which perhaps is a wider comment on the passage of time and how it will wait for no one. The 'leaden ' circles are a very interesting image to unpick. Lead is heavy which may indicate a heaviness or grief with the passage of time. However, lead is also pliable which connotes an idea of autonomy over one's own life. It seems as though it is suggesting that you can manipulate time to an extent perhaps willingly or unwillingly. Equally the heavy sound that this gives the image of could be a comment on the suppression of time and regret for the way the country has changed post-war as well as a regret for how the country is changing in more modern times. This is a view that would be very applicable to the readership of the time and also very true of 20's London as these new changes may have been seen as scary and been approached with a degree of trepidation. Another interpretation of this heavy sound could be, this idea that the sound encloses London and is what drives London. All of London is working to the same clock which may connote monotony. However, could just as equally be a picture of safety. this idea that Big Ben 'circling' London keeps its citizens safe. Perhaps, this is a literal safety because of the democracy that Big Ben has come to be associated with or maybe a more metaphorical safety that the citizens feel as they feel protected by the passage of time.

The use of the word ' dissolved' in this quote gives an impression of sound waves dissolving in the air which is a very strong mental image. Equally the idea of the 'Circles' links to a wider idea of circularity that we receive at the bottom of the page. Through the use of techniques such as ring composition with the mention of 'June' as well as the idea of 'omnibuses' which of course have wheels, it seems as though the image of the circle is one of great importance to Woolf and by an extension Dalloway. Perhaps this is to comment on the circle of life. The finality that everyone will die eventually and there will be new people born. Additionally, it could have been included as another way to illustrate the passage of time and the continually driving on of time like a wheel.

Another interesting extract in this passage of Mrs Dalloway is the mention of Clarissa's education. this being evident in the quote ' How she got through life with a few twigs of knowledge' The use of the word 'twigs'' in this quote connotes a sparsity of knowledge that Clarissa seems somewhat remorseful about. It wasn't until the 1921 education act that the school leaving age was raised to 14 so it may have been a common idea in London societies that older generations especially women who generally got a worse education than their male counterparts may wonder in what ways their life would have been different had they been properly educated.

Finally, the last way in which Woolf perfectly captures the landscape of London is through her references to war. The idea of the war still hangs heavily in the 'hot London air ' of Mrs Dalloway's city. This subtly reinforces the idea that the trauma and conflict were ongoing and

was still incredibly raw for those who had lost loved ones in it. Throughout the course of the Novel, Woolf explores the idea that the anxieties and Overwhelming grief of the war are long-lasting. David Bradshaw in his essay 'Mrs Dalloway and world war one' comments that the anxieties of war have been 'etched into every aspect of post-war life' in Dalloway's London. which is an acute observation. For example, the idea of war is continually referenced in the novel. Rather than overtly stating the horrors that the war inflicted on London's residents and on the way that it changed London's landscape there are subtle mentions of it dropped sporadically throughout the novel that allows the reader to feel the deep emotional pain in the novel. The use of Dalloway referring to an 'aeroplane' in one of her many descriptions of London may, to a modern reader, seem inconsequential. However one must remember two things. Aeroplanes were still something to be remarked about in the '20s and they were machines that were responsible for much suffering during the war. The aeroplane creates unease for those below it without Woolf ever having to explicitly say so the sound of the plane still 'ominously' brings to mind the German Planes that attacked London During the war. Another way in which the novel portrays the landscape of London concerning the war is through the employment of reverence and memorial. Dalloway is a condemnation of militarism and war however it also memorializes the war dead. David Bradshaw comments that every element of the post-war culture of remembrance is evoked. This remembrance is as though Woolf herself is answering Hughs question later in the novel 'what we owe the dead' There is an almost ceremonial way in which there reverence that commemorates the 'fallen' which parallel the rituals of remembrance instituted by the government.

In conclusion, it is evident that Woolf perfectly captures the Landscape of post-war London in a very human way.perhaps in a way that not much other literature of the time manages to do. There is a reverence of what has happened in years gone by but an ecstatic excitement in what will happen in the years to come.