

Suffering Creates the Greatest Fiction: Virginia Woolf's self-reflexivity in Mrs.Dalloway and Mrs.Dalloway's party

By

Sarah Thaeer Abd-almajeed Alithary

Department of English Language and Literature/ College of Education for Human Sciences,
University of Waist, Iraq

Email: Sarahlithary99@gmail.com

Thamir R.S.Az-Zubaidy

Department of English Language and Literature/ College of Education for Human Sciences,
University of Waist, Iraq

Abstract

Everyone on this planet has the ability, at some point in their lives, to reflect on who they are in a manner that is satisfactory to them. Every one of us is influenced in some way by the environment that we live in, and each of us has singular experiences that shape our personalities. The authors have inspired and developed some of the most remarkable ideas that have the potential to improve the lives of one or more people; nevertheless, these authors must have inspired themselves in order to generate these ideas. In many ways, the author's life experiences shape the author's identity and the work they produce. As the author writes, their past experiences resurface and inform their work. Their mental and physical problems, as well as gender, color, financial background, and other factors, have a significant impact on their work. For example, the struggles that Virginia Woolf faced due to her mental illness are mirrored in her writings. However, this does not necessarily mean that the reflection is negative; in fact, it could be quite the contrary. Despite the fact that she was afflicted with the disorder, she was able to achieve widespread popularity and was one of the first women to advocate for feminism and women's rights, in addition to producing numerous well-known works. The collection of short stories Mrs. Dalloway's Party and Mrs. Dalloway's novel will be explored as examples of personal experience's influence on a writer's work.

Keywords: Mrs. Dalloway, Party, short story, novel, Virginia Woolf, mental illness, autobiographical elements.

Virginia Woolf's Biography

Virginia Woolf, an English novelist, essayist, and critic, was born on January 25, 1882. She is widely regarded as one of the preeminent authors to emerge from England in the 20th century. Some of well-known works of Woolf include: *The Waves*, *Orlando*, and *To the Lighthouse*. During the first decade of the twentieth century, just before to Woolf's rise to prominence, England served as the scene for the most severe critique of the Victorian way of life. At this time, the Victorian way of thinking, especially about the family and education, was attacked, and people demanded change more than ever. In fact, these were unmistakable indications of a transition in the Victorian era's attitude toward women and their status in the public consciousness. This led directly to a change in the way that genders interact with one another, and there was a general belief that things needed to be restarted not just in terms of politics and society but also in terms of art and literature (Latham, 2021, pp. 7-9).

Woolf was the daughter of the renowned philosopher and scholar Sir Leslie Stephen, publisher of the two magazines *Cornhill Magazine* and *The Dictionary*. She received her early education in her father's library and engaged herself soon in the world of literature. Despite not having access to the formal education given to males, Woolf was able to educate herself by reading books from her father's enormous library, watching her father's writing ability, and growing up among her father's many intellectual friends. There, she met notable acquaintances of her father, including E.M. Forster and J.M. Keynes (McIntire, 2008, p. 127).

She began her career in writing while examining the Victorian contexts that surrounded her. She began her first diary in 1897, and during the following years she acquired a strong respect for female authors. Her growing admiration for women authors like Jane Austen was paralleled by her growing resistance to the predominance of males in society (Lounsbury B., 2014, P.18). She wed Leonard Woolf, an eminent successful author and critic from Cambridge, in England in 1912. This was eight years after the death of her father. In 1917, they established the Hogarth Press using an old printing press they had constructed. As editors, the Woolfs placed a premium on discovering and publishing emerging talent, and their publishing house, Hogarth Press, reflected this priority such as Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood (Majumdar, & McLaurin, 1997, Pp. 8-10).

The home of Virginia Woolf, located in Bloomsbury's Tavistock Square, transformed into a center point of literary and cultural activity, attracting a diverse group of intellectuals such as Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, and Clive Bell. These artists, critics, and authors gained recognition as members of the Cambridge-educated Bloomsbury Group. Their group included Vanessa Bell, Lytton Strachey, and John Maynard Keynes, among others. The Bloomsbury Group, in general, has derived the principles of love and beauty as the foundations of life from the intellectual interests of its members (Mephram, 1991, P.30).

Woolf is credited with authoring approximately fifteen works, the most recent of which, *A Writer's Diaries*, was not published until 1953 (several years after her passing). She passed away in Lewes, Sussex, England, on March 28, 1941, due to drowning (Mephram, p. 204). The overwhelming pressures of living during the Great War, according to one interpretation of the event, may have driven the individual to take his or her own life (1939-1945).

Mrs. Dalloway (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Jacob's Room* (1928) are three of Virginia Woolf's most notable novels and short stories (1922). She is a writer whose works are considered to align with the level of complexity that James Joyce exhibited in his work (Parsons, 2007, p.58). Because of this, the fact that her short stories have only garnered a minimal amount of attention from academics comes as a bit of a surprise to some readers. Despite this, she has made it a habit throughout her entire career, to play around with different approaches to the organisation of short stories. The short stories that Virginia Woolf produced are never given serious attention for analysis because reviewers are certain in their conviction that her novels have substance and are more significant than her short stories. Critics, on the other hand, are of the opinion that Woolf's short stories are nothing more than practise for when she writes her novels (Tallentire, 1963, pp. ii-iv).

Between the years 1906 and 1941, Woolf wrote a total of forty-six short stories; however, only eighteen of them were published during her lifetime. These short stories were published either separately or in collections by Hogarth Press and included *Kew Gardens* and *Monday or Tuesday*. Leonard Woolf published *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* in 1944 with the intention of making these writings available to a wider audience, and Stella

McNichol published *Mrs. Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence* in 1973 after Virginia Woolf had passed away. Both of these works were published after Virginia Woolf's passing.

In 1985, a collection of Virginia Woolf's shorter works titled *The Complete Shorter Fiction* was released. This book is a collection of all of her short stories; among the collection's contents are seventeen works that have never before been made available to the general public. Despite the fact that *Mrs. Dalloway's Party* is the one and only notion that defies this generalisation. The rest of these collections were not compiled in an objective manner at all. In most cases, the title of one of their collections of short stories, such as *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, is used as a marketing tool to promote the full collection. Short stories by Virginia Woolf were just as imaginative as her novels and essays in their own genres.

Suffering Creates the Greatest Fiction

Due of her experiences, Virginia Woolf experienced several psychological disorders throughout her lifetime. Beginning with the loss of her mother, then her half-sister, and finally her father, her half-brother was raped during her youth, and she endured the World Wars. Beginning in her childhood and continuing up to her final moments before taking her own life, she went through a series of traumatic mental losses and breakdowns. She was diagnosed with several ailments, the most of which were incorrect, resulting in multiple breakdowns. She had a number of unsuccessful attempts at ending her life before she was eventually successful. (Gay, Breckin, & Reus, 2017, pp. 96-97)

She suffers from manic depression in addition to hallucinations, and Woolf herself has stated that she hears voices in her head, but her doctors did not believe her at the time due to a lack of self-awareness. The condition known as manic depression, also known as bipolar disorder, can be characterised as "a biologically based cycling of moods that takes someone from a state of crippling depression to euphoric agitation" (Kottler, 2005. p.6). Woolf's illness and depression had a significant impact on her writing, as much of what she endured is reflected in the characters of her works (Berman, 2016, p.98, p.277). Woolf as a modern writer and critic was profoundly influenced by modern ideas, as demonstrated by her experimental novels. Woolf really paid particular attention to the distinctions between the moments of being and not-being, which she saw as the essential elements of human life. She was writing in a unique style, such as *Stream of Consciousness* and the 'moments of being,' which implies that there are distinct portrayals of certain occurrences in which the reader can see, listen to, taste, smell, and feel what was occurring at the time. In other words, the reader can experience all that was happening at the time (Miciunaite, 2011, p.41, p.52, p.67).

The majority of her works are autobiographical since they reflect her author emotional struggles. Her works, in which she discusses topics such as incest, violence, class, and shattered families, are informed by her personal experiences. According to Woolf's own words in her journals, the physicians' strategy for healing her was utterly ineffective, pointless, and a waste of time (Mephram, p.54). For instance, one way of therapy was bed rest, which consisted of staying in bed without moving for several days or even weeks. During this period, Woolf began to see things like her deceased mother, sometimes staring at the walls for hours and hearing voices that no one else could hear, leading psychiatrists to label these experiences as hallucinations (Whitworth, 2005, p.170).

Nonetheless, Woolf found hearing the noises and the other symptoms fascinating, especially noting the changes in her room's lighting (Woolf, 1978, p.238). When she experiences breakdowns, she begins to question her writing skills, despite being one of the finest authors of her generation at the time. Woolf believed that the anguish she experienced

was a form of inner nobility and truth. Suffering is what inspired her to write the best stories; her madness and genius are intertwined. She recognized what she was feeling and her symptoms, and she expected another relapse (Koutsantoni, 2012).

As for what caused her mental illness, a large number of academics in the field of psychology first hypothesised that it was related to a genetic inheritance. Her father, who suffered from recurrent breakdowns and was sent to a psychiatric facility, was only one of several members of her family who struggled with mental health issues, including her mother and sister (Orr, 2004, p.4). In addition to the sexual assault she endured as a child and the consequences she experienced as an adult, her mentality is damaged, as she constantly doubts her talents, and her husband's depression forced him to leave her. According to an essay written by Katerina Koutsantoni in 2012 and published in the journal *Medical Humanities*, she discussed Woolf's disease, its symptoms, and the possibility that it may be inherited. She also addressed the link between bipolar disorder and creativity, saying that "manic-depressive illness and creativity were indeed linked" (P.8). Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, for instance, suffers from shell shock, which was just discovered in the modern era and is now known as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Septimus Warren Smith is a military veteran who has both physical and emotional scars as a result of his experience. Before the First World War, he was employed as a Clerk, but he, like with the rest of his generation's young, romanticized the war and served in it. Because of the trauma that Smith has been through in his time as a veteran of the war, he feels as though the conflict is not yet done in the postwar period. Trauma is defined by Cathy Caruth as the "verwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Ward, 2015, p.4). In this sense, belated is the most conspicuous characteristic, as the trauma is not fully experienced in real time. Instead, it occurs gradually inside the recurrent ownership of the one who encounters it.

Even though the event took place in the past, Smith's mind continues to dwell on it in a continuous stream of thoughts. His presence in the novel serves several purposes, including communicating the anguish of war victims in trying to find a cure, providing meaning to their suffering, and critiquing social and political structures. He was unable to convey his experiences and sorrow to others. Smith suffers from several symptoms, including headaches, insomnia, anxieties, and nightmares (Woolf, p. 138). He continues to recall memories from the battle and the death of his friend Evan beneath his eyes.

Not just the symptoms, but also the approach to treatment, is important in this instance, as was the case with Woolf. Two of the methods suggested by Dr. Bradshaw in the novel really occurred to Woolf. The two treatments consist of several months of bed rest (or rest cure). In this treatment, Woolf ought to maintain her silence and spend her time by herself without engaging in any activity. The therapy administered to Smith by drinking milk (milk cure) to acquire weight was also utilized by Woolf's psychiatrist, who required her to consume the equivalent of five pints of milk every day. (Kottler, 2005, p.117).

Another parallel between Woolf and Smith is the conversation the doctor has with the patient's husband about the patient's ailment while the patient is absent. When Smith and his wife Lucrezia saw the doctor, the doctor first spoke with Smith's wife before allowing Smith to enter. Doctors were unable to correctly diagnose his condition, as they did with other traumatized soldiers who participated in the war. Placing them in institutions and separating them from their families, as was the case with Smith, would alienate them. Doctor Bradshaw

mentions "a case of complete breakdown— complete physical and nervous breakdown" (Woolf, p. 146) many times without elaborating on the cause. In addition, Bradshaw gives Smith and his wife the directive to abstain from having any more children, which is in line with what Woolf's physicians have recommended.

Dr. Bradshaw continues by stating that Smith must be separated from his wife and treated with bed rest in order to recover. Holmes, a second doctor who supports Smith's admission to a mental institution. Smith has resentment at the doctor and often asks, "Must," "must," and why "must?" What influence did Bradshaw have on him?" What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?" (Woolf, p. 223). Smith views life in the post-war period as challenging and subsequently takes his own life to demonstrate his triumph over the memories of the arduous conflict. Smith responds, "I'll give it to you," laughs, and then gives himself (his physical body) to the doctor (p. 264). However, Smith is described by Dr. Holmes as a coward because he refuses to surrender his soul. Holmes cannot comprehend why Smith jumped, but Lucrezia finally understands her husband. He resolves his mental fight by throwing himself over Mrs. Filmer's area railings. Since Woolf attempted suicide multiple times due to her manic illness, Smith's suicide is interpreted as a foreshadowing of her own.

As two sides of a coin, a person with bipolar disorder alternates between times of mania (extreme happiness) and periods of depression. Smith and Mrs. Dalloway are representative of the text's author. Woolf's illness, Smith's illness, and Dalloway's joy of life in which she perceives beauty in the tiniest of details represent moments of mania. On the first page of the novel, the reader is informed that Clarissa Dalloway has recently recovered from the illness and is still feeble. Her husband, Richard Dalloway, is a member of Parliament. She is a member of the upper middle class. Clarissa Dalloway is educated, clever, and sensitive. She performs a vital role in society by hosting gatherings to bring people together, "an offering for the sake of offering" (P. 122). She must attend parties, although her involvement is less enthusiastic than it should be on such occasions. She has a tremendous enthusiasm for life.

She has an extraordinary capacity for appreciating life. Mrs. Dalloway appeared pleasant and at comfortable, but on the inside she was disturbed. Something within her looked to be severing her soul, causing her severe anxiety as a result of a mysterious ailment. Because of her pain, she constantly recalled Peter Walsh and her youth in Bruton, and she questioned whether the path she had chosen was the correct one. In this text, the events and characteristics shared by Mrs. Dalloway and Woolf herself represent her experiences, emotions, and thoughts.

First, on the bright side, she enjoys life and creation; after her breakdowns, Woolf continues to be creative and to write. Mrs. Dalloway's relationship with her husband is comparable to that of Woolf and Leonard. Leonard was extremely kind and accommodated Woolf's need for solitude. In addition, the marital connection happened seldom during their marriage (Mepham, pp. 32-33). As a result of her traumatic experience after being raped and her attraction to women. Mrs. Dalloway slept alone in her attic room, and her husband was quite accommodating of her demand for privacy. In addition, Leonard and Richard Dalloway comply with the doctors' requests regarding their spouses.

Because her sister was left alone in the attic, Woolf viewed it as a psychologically complex setting. She may have referred to Mrs. Dalloway's remain in this room because she remembered it (Orr,p.23). Mrs. Dalloway struggles with feelings of insecurity and an unusual form of inadequacy due to the circumstances of her life. She isolated herself from both her environment and even the Bloomsbury group, of which she was an essential member. She did this in the same way as Woolf did. Her mood was in a state of perpetual flux, and it would shift

over the course of her seizures, starting and ending depending on her condition. Mrs. Dalloway is saddened to learn that Smith has passed just after she had just greeted Smith's doctor.

However, she does not recognize him, which disrupts Clarissa Dalloway's party. She leaves the crowded room on her own. Woolf recorded in her 1925 diaries that she learned of the death of her friend Jacques Raverat at a party: "Nevertheless, I do not any longer feel inclined to doff the cap to death. I like to go out of the room talking, with an unfinished casual sentence on my lips. That is the effect it had on me—no leavetakings, no submission, but someone stepping out into the darkness. For her though the nightmare was terrific. All I can do now is to keep natural with her, which is I believe a matter of considerable importance. More and more do I repeat my own version of Montaigne—"It's life that matters." (Woolf, 1973,p.71).

Clarissa Dalloway interprets Smith's death as a licence to live, and so she continues her party. At Mrs. Dalloway's Party, we see the unusual meeting of life and death, in which death has the capacity to give life meaning. Mrs. Dalloway's search for the meaning of life concludes with the declaration that enjoying life to the fullest and becoming a part of the universe are the most important things in the world. As in T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, the protagonists of these stories, who are referred to collectively as Waste landers, live in a dystopian wasteland. When Eliot was still in the process of composing it, he would read it to Virginia Woolf in his own voice. He became her assistant editor in 1917, and he recommended she print and publish *Ulysses* in 1918 (in Woolf and her husband Leonard's Hogarth Press) (Mephram, p.47, p.57).

She attempted to identify the future direction of literature after reading *Ulysses*. The protagonists in Eliot's poem are less effective than the paralytic Londoners whose thoughts range from the present to the past as they walk the streets. The Wastelanders in this poem have lost their religion as well as their identities, and as a result, the war has caused them to become fragmented. In his work *The Waste Land and Other Poems*, Raghukul Tilak argues that contemporary man has lost his enthusiasm and faith, and this decline in faith has led to the loss of emotional and spiritual life. Since we are human, we are obligated to take action and perform either good or evil deeds; yet, it is better to perform wicked deeds than to do nothing at all. Modern man lacks morals, which inhibits his ability to act. In a corrupt society, individuals die in life and exist as corpses (1993, p.134).

Regarding the collection of short stories: *Mrs. Dalloway's Party*, the first story Mrs. Dalloway in *Bond Street*, served as the inspiration for one of the chapters in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. There are similarities in the plots of both works. For instance, Mrs. Dalloway herself goes to buy gloves instead of flowers in the story, and the plot concentrates upon Clarissa's childhood recollections. In the novel, the events are described in greater depth than in the short story, in which half of the events concentrate around the glove shop and the selection of the proper gloves. In addition, the character of Mrs. Dalloway is same in both works, bearing the same resemblance to the author Woolf herself.

The next stories, *The Man Who Loved His Kind*, *The Introduction*, and *Together and Apart*, deal with emotions of alienation despite belonging to a group of people, as well as dread, insecurity, and anxiety. This is what was occurring throughout Woolf's sickness. She emphasizes the difficulties of understanding oneself and others completely. The plot of *The New Dress* is likewise comparable to the themes of the preceding stories. The story's events resemble the author's life, which focuses on the influence of women's clothing on their psychological state and intellectual stability. The clothing are the primary indicator of environment, personality, and social status. In her classic essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes, "London was like a workshop. London was like a machine " (Larsson, 2017, p.139).

Michael Cunningham wrote in his article *Virginia Woolf, My Mother, and Me* (2011) that "fearless feminist though she was, she could be reduced to days of self-recrimination if someone made a snide remark about her outfit". Mable Waring was fascinated on the woman at the party, and she couldn't stop thinking about how she looked. In addition, she felt nervous as she wondered whether the visitors were critiquing her appearance. The mirror is terrifying to Virginia Woolf because it reminds her of the time Gerald Duckworth raped her in their house. He held her in his arms as she observed in the mirror their reflections and the events transpiring in front of her. After this event, Woolf rarely looked in the mirror. She feels insecure when she looks in the mirror because it evokes memories of her past and causes her to reflect on her flaws. (Mephram, p.181).

The majority of Woolf's writings, including her novel, her short stories, and even some of her other writings, take place in London. Her novels are filled with references to specific streets, parks, and landmarks in London, where her characters regularly walk. Walk along their roads, stopping at their rest stations, dead ends, shortcuts, and detours, for instance. Woolf imbues her writings with character development that is marked by a strong political awareness. Since she constantly specifies the precise timing of each event, none of Woolf's characters may walk at any moment in time or at any hour of the day. Woolf would regularly spend several hours of each day walking alone, either with her husband or on her own (Dally, 2014, p. 44).

The protagonists in these works all struggle, in their own unique ways, to come to terms with the changes that have occurred as a result of the First World War. A significant number of them are driven by a strong yearning to restore things to the condition it was in before the war. The characters walk and think, and vice versa; readers are continually given the impression that they are inside someone else's head. Generally, these ideas occur on the streets of London or during a party at Mrs. Dalloway's home in Westminster.

Conclusion

As a result of the several traumatic experiences she had throughout her life, Virginia Woolf struggled with a variety of psychiatric issues. When she writes about topics such as incest, class, violence, and shattered families, she draws on her own experiences, which she draws from. The approach that the doctors took to treating her was not only ineffective but also a total waste of time and useless. When Woolf first started to have doubts about her capacity to write, she had already arrived at the stage where she was the most accomplished writer of her generation. Her insanity and her creative ability were intricately connected, and it was suffering that gave her the ability to create the most vivid imagination. The source of genuine writing is one's life experience, which can include all of life's emotions (such as joy, sorrow, and happiness), and is just as significant as intrinsic talent in this regard.

It is possible for a novelist or fiction writer's imagination to modify the ratio of certain events, emotions, characteristics of characters, and patterns of behavior; yet, there is no novel that is not based on reality, regardless of whether or not the novel is imaginary. This event is the energy that motivates the writer's memories and evokes the qualitative sense of human suffering. Additionally, this experience helps to lighten the load of his pension. However, in order to achieve the human depth that finds human representations of the author's struggle and the times of anxiety he has as a result of practicing the many different life circumstances, the author must perform a work that demands a deeper look. The mark of a successful writer is the ability to draw from one's own experiences and the circumstances of their life in a way that is,

at the same time, appealing, fascinating, and authentic. As a result, Woolf was able to reflect on many aspects of her life in the two works, the short story collection and the novel, which were discussed in the previous section.

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