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**VIRGINIA WOOLF AND HER NARRATION
OF MOMENTS OF BEING:**

*An analysis of *To the Lighthouse*
and *Mrs. Dalloway**

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are often seeking for something unexpected or incredible, forgetting the importance of life and its essence. Portraying the simplicity of moments of beings is an ability that just few authors were capable of, one of them is Virginia Woolf. Woolf was able in her works to narrate feelings and events that represent the simple life in its depth and expressiveness. This thesis examines the role of Virginia Woolf in Modernism and her revolutionary writing. The innovative way of expressing feelings and emotions brought to life by the author leads the readers to a different world, making them think about what surrounds them. Her dissatisfaction with the third person led her to what is now called the stream of consciousness, that felt more truthful and real. Woolf had the capacity of putting thoughts in concrete words making her texts rich, different, and innovative. The proposed analysis focuses on two of her most important novels: *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The thematic thread shared by the two works reminds us about the concrete events of life that hit us every day. Themes as Death or Family are presented to the reader as more than an uncomplicated accident and, through the characters' mind, Woolf transmits what is called a moment of being, a sudden revelation that relates to every human being. The character analysis conducted in this work provides a complete view of the human mind and how everyone has the capacity to experience and understand life in different ways. Virginia Woolf reminds us of what it means to see the world through different eyes, turning the everydayness of an ordinary day or the life of a family into points of reflection and inspiration.

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought about writing down your thoughts to understand better what is going on in your own head? If not, imagine reading exactly what is going on inside the mind of a person, every distraction, idea, and reasoning. Reading Virginia Woolf sounds exactly like reading a human mind during a normal day, doing simple activities, and living common experiences. She is able, through her words, to make us understand how to give value to the simplest normal things that feel irrelevant while living them but that, at the end, mark us without even noticing.

Virginia Woolf was born in January 1882 and committed suicide in 1941. She is one of the greatest and most innovative authors of the 20th century, bringing light and novelty in a world that was struggling and changing. Her writing developed in a historical period we refer to as Modernism, a relatively short span of time full of innovation and confusion involving every science and subject. Life, religion, and received knowledge started to be put into question, researching for new ways of expressing reality and emotions. In addition, the two-world war impacted deeply on the life people were used to, causing profound consequences related to mental and physical health. People were traumatized and needed a safe place to hide and find themselves again. They needed a different way of seeing reality. Here is where authors and artists such as Virginia Woolf found their place. Woolf started writing when she was very young, she needed a way of escaping her own reality. An apparently privileged life, but full of difficulties and sufferings: her mother died when she was just a child, and shortly after the loss of her father had deep consequences on her mind and health. She started to suffer from mental breakdowns, aggravating her mental health day by day. Her family had a significant role in Virginia's life and troubles, creating in the author the necessity of running away from a reality that should have made her feel safe. She married quite young with a man called Leonard Woolf; her husband stood by her side until her last day of life, supporting and loving her unconditionally. Her works marked a whole generation bringing new techniques and non-traditional visions. Two of her most famous works are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Mrs. Dalloway is surely one of the greatest literary works of the 20th century. The narration starts and ends in one day following the minds of several characters for twenty-four hours. Woolf captures the inner and profound thoughts of Mrs. Dalloway, a privileged English woman, and the ones surrounding her. The day of Mrs. Dalloway travels parallel to the one of Septimus, a war veteran suffering from shellshock, who decides to take his life at the end of the novel. The author, thanks to her ability of presenting time in a circular way, goes back and forward with the experiences of her characters, unifying past, present and future. Her connections and reflections help the reader

understand the simplest things that life has to offer, shooting a reality through several eyes to give different visions of the same screen.

To the Lighthouse, an autobiographical work that was firstly born as a way of ordering her feelings and thoughts towards the author's family and past. It was her way of communicating her emotions and trying to solve and get through her inner and intrusive ideas. *To the Lighthouse* is the story of a family that spend their summertime at a beach house, surrounded by friends and daily habits. Mrs. and Mr. Ramsey are the representation of Virginia's father and the mother she never had. The novel presents the vision of what a middle-class family looks like, with their difficulties and impacts. The main and significant event in the story is the death of Mrs. Ramsey, the most influential character, which will help the other members of the family to find themselves learning how to show each other the love they have lost. *To the Lighthouse* is a story of deep grief and love, an analysis of what family means and how something so common and simple can affect and represent each one of us.

Even though the two novels named above are different, they share several themes and patterns. Both are indeed a way of expressing the author's emotions through the analysis and presentation of her beliefs and feelings. She experienced and described death in both works, showing the effects of mental and physical health and how living, or better choosing to live, is not something to take for granted. How death can impact each one of us even if we feel it far and impossible. Death affected Virginia's life since her childhood and caused her sufferings and difficulties that the reader can find through in her works. Both novels put family and its development in the center of the story, reminding us how every family has its own experiences to overcome. Family in her novels is ordinary and not idyllic. Finally, time is the common and innovative theme that both works share. Time for Virginia Woolf is not linear. She strongly believes and reports in her descriptions that time is subjective, that a simple two minutes can influence the life of a person forever. Past, present and future travels in the minds of the characters without following a pattern giving the author the possibility of working with different events that relates to one another.

Virginia Woolf presents in her words the idea of moments of being. Each day in our life brings impressions, memories, and feelings at once present and past, and the connection between memory and a living moment is constant. Through these moments of being Woolf reminds each reader that we are unique, unrepeatable, and magnificent, so we have to live, fully and appreciate life for what it is, even when it seems too difficult.

CHAPTER 1

Virginia Woolf and her role in the XX century

Writer, essayist, critic. Daughter, sister, activist.

The figure of Virginia Woolf could be associated with several attributes. A woman that made the difference in a world that was changing, in a society full of uncertainty and conflicts. A woman that was regarded as one of the leading figures in 20th century literature, changing the way writers used to see and describe the world around them. She was a critically acclaimed novelist and essayist. Her most famous works include the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Before describing and explaining the role and the impact of Virginia Woolf is essential to understand and navigate the deep water that is the 20th century and its innovation, analyzing acutely the cultural movement corresponding to Modernism.

1.1 The historical and social context: Modernism

Let us go back in time and dive into early 20th century England, which is marked by a period of harsh controversy against the hypocrisy and conventions of the Victorian era and a new way of perceiving the reality that led to a profound change in all aspects, from historical, social to personal. The causes of these changes are to be found in the general concern and discontent caused by the Industrial Revolution and the bourgeois values. England was going through the collapse of the traditional canons thanks to new discoveries and studies presented by significant figures such as Einstein, Nietzsche, Freud, and Bergson that also caused an expansion of education with the consequent increase of writers who demanded new forms of expression. In fact, despite the continuous technological advances, the idea that progress was always good was under questioning. The changing generations and the overwhelming dislocations of the time seemed to topple even the solid beliefs and assumption inquiring an entire civilization and culture.

In these circumstances, where everything was starting to be called into question, Modernism was born and spread. A term that represents the general temper of the twentieth century arts. An ideology characterized by the appearance of a series of Avant-Gard that cover every field, from literature, art, music, cinema, whose common purpose is renewal and modernity. A philosophical-aesthetic movement that, following the canon of the western society, was born due to the enormous

transformations and changes that happened to be during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Among the several events that had determined the development of modernism, it is essential to underline the evolution of the modern industrialized society and the fast growth of the urbanization, followed by the First World War and all its horrible consequences. The main idea of Modernism was to renew and to go over a culture that was already outdated. A crisis-centered¹ views of history that brought an abrupt break with the old traditions leading to a contemporary revolution. Several are the innovation during this period, such as the atonal music, the abstract art or, as discussed during the following pages, the stream of consciousness technique presented and used by different authors as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. The intentional deformation of human shapes in art, the breakdown of space and time limitations or the emphasis over the subjectivity are just some of the most notable features that developed during this period of change. The modern poetry was chasing a new way and a new dimension to express ideas and reality. Indeed, the modernism signifies a paradigmatic shift, a major revolt against the literary and social traditions of the Western world, and a heritage that was under attack and that people wanted to change. A “sudden break” forms the nineteenth ideology and its positivism.

The philosophical background really influenced the spread of these new way of representing and thinking about reality and life. Sigmund Freud’s work, for instance, encourage self-analysis and this self-reflection is easily visible in several literary work, some of whom are analyzed in this research. The new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness was expressed in art with a realistic and humanistic representation towards style and techniques to pursuit a deeper penetration of life². Moreover, the revolutionary idea of “God is dead” presented by Nietzsche really encourage a sense of confusion and disorientation³. The new ways of expressing reality were a consequence of a culture that was in complete crisis. A prevailing, dominant, authentically, and contemporary view of the world. An intellectual revolution that built the basis of a great aesthetic and literary possibilities. The philosophical crisis travelled with the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th century that helped the increase of an economic and technological expansion. Industrialization led to both positive and negative aspects. From one hand it led to the development and rise of cities and urbanization, improving the lifestyle and consequently increasing the world population. On the other hand, it helped the creation of machine guns, airplanes and chemicals that were some of the protagonists during World War I. The rise of industrialization and of the economy led also to an idea of nationalism and imperialism that were at the foundation of the war’s tensions. Modernism,

¹ Malcolm Bradbury and James Mcfarlane, *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890 –1930*. London, England, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 22

² M. Bradbury and J. Mcfarlane, *Modernism*. London, England, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 20.

³ For further information about Friedrich Nietzsche: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche/>

indeed, developed with the broke out of World War I in 1914, becoming one of the most devastated wars of all time. The link between Modernism and the Great war is ordinary and common. Many critics have underlined how many authors, such as James Joyce, developed in the prewar but their work started to be intensified due to the war. In fact, even though the war led to growth in industrial development, the disappearance of unemployment and the increase in wages, on the other hand stressed the fragility of men who, fighting in the front, begin to develop the symptoms that at the time were associates to female hysteria⁴. Men on the frontier began to suffer from post-traumatic disorder also known as *shellshock*. The term started to be used in 1915 and it comes from the connection between the weapons and the shock suffered by the soldier. Men fighting in the Great War started to face physical and mental breakdown, trembling, hysterical deafness and blindness, panic attacks and amnesia. When these symptoms started to spread the first followed procedures were isolation, hypnosis, and the electroshock. Fortunately, science and psychological developments brought to the introduction of new treatments that did not include violence and physical suffer, such as Freud's psychoanalysis⁵. Cambridge dictionary defines psychoanalysis as any of several of the theories of the human personality that attempt to examine a person's unconscious mind to discover the hidden causes of their mental problems. Give free rein to speech and the flow of thoughts were ones of the wherewithal to help to find the main traumas⁶. These new way of exploring the human mind contributed and influenced several poets and writers who tried to show to the world how our consciousness works through their words. On an opposite direction from the weakness of the men in the trenches, behind the walls of the suffering houses, women started to take the key role in daily life. That expedited the need of emancipation leading to the creation of new feminist movements that led to the recognition of voting rights in England in 1918, for all the women over thirty years old, upgraded in 1928 for all the woman over twenty-one years old. The revolutionary changing and developments contributed to a shift in the forms and themes that were used to be found in literature, an innovation that broadcasted in the novel. A genre that started to get away from the old traditions taking on new features. The modernist novel started to point out different problems and matters related to the complexities of its own form, the representation of inward states of consciousness and, for instance, the freeing of narrative art from the determination of an onerous plot. Indeed, the modern novel questioned the linear narrative, the logical and progressive order and the establishing of a stable surface of reality. Furthermore, the novel witnessed major stylistic change such as the

⁴ M. Bradbury and J. Mcfarlane, *Modernism*. London, England, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 25.

⁵ Sherry Vincent, *The Great War, and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). Reviewed by Albrinck Meg, Duke University Press, 2004.

⁶ Definition of Psychoanalysis: English meaning – Cambridge Dictionary

dissolution of the narrator's sovereignty, of the linear interweaving and of the traditional concept of time and space. In fact, the nineteenth century also opens with new theories about time and space, the most relevant one refers to the concept of multiplicity presented by Henri Bergson⁷. The French philosopher attempted to unify in a consistent way the two contradictory features of heterogeneity and continuity. Bergson proposes to differentiate between time and space, he distinguishes between the physical time, identifiable by a clock that mark time in a precise and punctuated way, and the time of consciousness that is subjective and uneven. The objectivity of Naturalism is substitute by a more subjective and personal vision where no one can be a reliable interpreter of reality. It developed a narrative that describes futile everyday scenes which, at the end, strike and move the reader. It is the expression of a hidden interiority that seems no-sense even though it relates to everyone and every situation. Writers started to discuss the hidden feeling, emotions and thoughts making the reader feels familiar with what was happening to the character. The description of what is real, true, and common. Virginia Woolf in her essay '*Modern Fiction*' underlines how modern writers should cease their ties with the old and traditional fiction writing. Indeed, events in life happen in many different a various way and the traditional approach was not capable of reflect it properly⁸.

The modern stylistic revolution came from historical opportunities for change in human relationships. The main new idea was experimentalism, a radical and innovated art where myth, structure and organization collapse in order that art could, somehow, fulfil itself⁹. Like romanticism, this new movement originated at the beginning of a century that was going through a deep intellectual and social change, coming to dominate and modify the sensibility, aesthetics, and mind of the greatest writers.

1.2 Virginia Woolf's life

Virginia Woolf was born in this context full of changes and revolutionary ideas.

⁷ For further information about Henri Bergson, Perception and Time, see <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/#PercMemo>.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Modern Fiction*, from McNeille, Andrew, ed. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928. London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.

⁹ M. Bradbury and J. Mcfarlane, *Modernism*. London, England, Penguin Books, 1991, p 25.

Virginia Woolf, also known as Adeline Virginia Stephen, was born on January twenty-five, 1882, in London, England. She died at the age of fifty-eight years old and had been one of the most influential English writers due to her novel and her nonlinear approaches to narrative. She authored several essays on artistic theory, history, women, and politics even though she is best known for her novels, especially *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the lighthouse* (1927). Woolf was the child of Victorian parents. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was an English critic, author and first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Her mother, Julia Prinsep Stephen, was born and grew up in India working as a nurse and as a model for several painters. They had three children other than Virginia named Thoby, Vanessa and Adrian. Both her parents were widow when they met, and they already had different children from the previous marriage, Laura Makepeace, Stephen and George, Gerald, and Stella Duckworth. The author was raised in a privileged English household and her parents were free-thinking people, connected socially and artistically. All the girls of her family were taught at home thanks also to the family's library. Nineteenth century London was a city of contrasts, there were the leisured rich with their secure income and elegant style and there were the desperately poor. During her early years Virginia became familiar with London's streets and used to play in Kensington Garden. From the time of her birth until 1896 Virginia Woolf spent all her summers in St. Ives, a beach town at the southwest of England. The house overlooked cobby's Bay and the Godrevy lighthouse that inspired her writing and her works, moreover she incorporated scenes from those happy days into her modernist novel, *To the lighthouse* (1927). Virginia was curious, intelligent, and playful as many other children of her age. She had always been passionate about writing and reporting reality, in fact she started a family newspaper, the *Hyde Park Gate News*, to narrate and document her family's adventures. She always felt the lack of a formal education but the rigorous course of reading she set herself must have been more appropriate to her eventual career as a writer. She was a sensitive child but although she was late in learning to speak, she was very soon using words with extraordinary facility. Nevertheless, her childhood and her cheerful character were darkened by early traumas. She was indeed sexually abused by her half – brothers George and Gerald Duckworth and in 1895, at the age of thirteen, she unexpectedly lost her mother. The death of her mother caused her first mental breakdown and her mental situation got worst after the loss of her half-sister Stella, two years later. By now she was lonely, her father became increasingly gloomy and withdrawn and Virginia's excursions into the social world were failures since she had no small talk. Virginia was also the main recipient of the emotional demands made by her father. Her resentment was tempered by her appreciation of his intellectual integrity. Her father died in 1904 and she started to feel filled with guilt, forgetting his faults, and convincing

herself that she had failed fully to appreciate his good qualities. Her grief and morbidity became such that those around her realized that she was approaching madness, she heard birds singing in Greek and tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a window. In 1904 she published her first article in a weekly newspaper and was soon writing reviews and other short pieces. She also taught at Morley college, an evening institute for workers. Here she had her experience of the kind of people who read book rather than write them. She appreciated their intelligence and saw how they suffered because of their relative lack of education. She worked there for three years. In 1905 she started to write professionally. Then, after a family trip to Greece in 1906, her brother Thoby died of fever, and she was capable to overcome the loss of the brother. After these traumatic events, her brother and sister sold the family house in Hyde Park gate and bought a new home in the Bloomsbury area of London. By moving they were escaping from the eyes which had watched so closely over their upbringing. Suddenly they were free from the strict conventions of their class and age. After a fleeting time, Vanessa became engaged to Clive Bell. They kept the house after their marriage and Adrienne and Virginia moved. They still spent much time together and as little as a year after the wedding, Clive and Virginia began a flirtation which was to continue for some years. She was certainly not in love with Clive; indeed, her main motivation was probably her loneliness in the face of her sister's married happiness. This behavior did not bring Vanessa any closer to her¹⁰. In 1899 Thoby went to Cambridge University where he soon became friendly with some people who were members of a group called *the Apostles*. It had been founded in 1820 and only new undergraduates of exceptional promise were invited to join. Leonard Woolf was invited to join in 1902 and together with other intellectual they will become part of a group called The Bloomsbury group. After Cambridge Toby and others intellectual were used to meet every week to discuss about art, music, literature...an inner circle of intellectuals and artists that also Virginia started to attend and be associated with. Virginia first listened to and then participated enthusiastically in the discussions, and this must have made up for the university education she had missed. Virginia was a sparkling talker, not least because of her almost uncontrolled imagination. She would introduce newcomers with entirely invented descriptions of their lives and characters. In conversations and in her letters, she tended to describe in a brilliant and imaginative way, things as she felt they ought to be rather than as they were. They became famous in 1910 for what was called the *dreadnought hoax*: some of the members dressed up as a delegation of Ethiopian royals as they persuaded the English royal navy to guide them around their warship called *the HMS dreadnought*¹¹. The successful hoax reached the national front pages. Moreover, in 1910 there were

¹⁰ Leonard Woolf, ed., *A Writer's Diary. Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1959.

¹¹ Salam, S., Khan, S. A., & Ahmad, K. "A psychoanalytical reading of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* in relation to

two distinct parts to the Bloomsbury group: on one side it was centered around Vanessa and Clive and the art set, on the other the literary Bloomsbury included Virginia who was still writing reviews and was working hard at her first novel. Soon afterwards Virginia suffered another nervous breakdown, perhaps because of the excitement of the hoax or perhaps because she thought she was close to finishing her first novel. Thanks to the Bloomsbury group, Virginia met Leonard Woolf¹². Since 1904 Leonard Woolf, who was one of Toby's original friends at Cambridge, had been a civil servant in Salon and he returned in June 1911 and before the year was out, he proposed to Virginia. Leonard Woolf's father had been a successful barrister but had died at age forty-eight leaving a widow and nine young children. Leonard did well at school and that was expected to do equally well at Cambridge. He was overconfident; he did not do particularly well in his degree and did even worse in the civil service examination. Virginia was accurate when, writing to Violet Dickinson, she called her future husband as a '*penniless Jew*.' They married in August 1912; Virginia was thirty and Leonard thirty-one. Leonard published his first novel based on his experiences in Salon, but it was a critical rather than a financial success. Virginia, instead, was continuing to work on '*The Voyage Out*' as she had been for many years. As it neared completion, her health declined. Throughout her life her major crisis and period of mental illness coincided with the period between the completion and the publication of her novels. When she moved back to London, she tried to commit suicide. Throughout this period Leonard, who had not been properly warned of the extent of Virginia's mental instability, was suffering too but he did eventually discover that by keeping her away from excitement, not allowing her to get tired and making sure she ate properly, he could keep her healthy both mentally and physically. They then left central London moving to Richmond.

The Voyage Out was published in 1915 to critical acclaim. For twenty years after its publication, she experienced no major breakdowns and settle down to married life and to writing. Many of her friends from this time onwards were completely unaware of her history of mental illness. To them, she appeared lively and balanced. She was indeed happy for much of the time thanks to stability which Leonard had brought to her life. Theirs was a successful marriage and it is quite likely that, without Leonard's love and support, Virginia would never have been able to write as she did. In 1917 the Woolf bought a printing press and published a small book. The work was time-consuming, but they did it all themselves and made a small profit. The spouses founded the Hogarth Press, a publishing house that was originally born in part with the intention of engaging the

Virginia Woolf's personal life", Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ), 2022

¹² For further information, Virginia Woolf's documentary by Academy Media:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hnlsh8WyPE>

writer in a manual work, to rest the mind and eliminate anxieties. In 1919 they moved to Monk's house, their country home until Virginia died. As her novels became increasingly successful, they were able to improve the house. She started, in her writing, to break with the traditional form of the English novel. The real turning point came in 1926 with the success of *To the Lighthouse*, after which money was never a worry. Virginia was well enough now for them to take a London house, something which she had missed. In 1923 Virginia met Vita Sackville-West, a gifted and attractive novelist. By the year after they were close friends, whether their love affair was physical is something that will never be known, but they were certainly very much attracted to each other. In *Orlando* Virginia describes Vita's life as if she aged from sixteen to thirty-six between the years 1586 and 1928, starting life as a boy and changing into a woman. Virginia was also unhappy at not having children of her own. Her doctors had decided that her mental equilibrium was too precarious to take such a risk. Quentin Bell, who was her nephew and the author of the fullest biography of her, remembers her affinity with children. The publication of *A Room of One's Own* in 1928 grants her a place at the forefront of the feminist movement, with its witty and polished comparison of the lots of men and women. She became more famous, and more people wanted to know her.

The year 1939 brought the start of the Second World War, the Woolf's house in London was bombed so they had to live all the time at Monk's house. There were many pressures on Virginia, her stability relied on rest, a calm environment and nourishing food and these were not now possible. The war depressed her and reminded her that she had last gone mad during the first world war. On March twenty-nine, 1941, she wrote a note for Leonard explaining that she was hearing voices and was certain that she was going mad and would not recover. She left the house and walked down the river where, by putting rocks in her pocket, she drowned herself.

Much of Virginia Woolf's personality transpires from her journals, written from 1915 until a few days before her death. Diaries that Leonard Woolf himself decided to publish in 1953 under the heading *A Writer's Diary*. She did not write it regularly every day, but the diary gives for twenty-seven years a consecutive record of what she did.¹³ From the daily entries comes the account of a fulfilled life: from the visits of friends to new meetings, from new novels to the anxiety of the reviews, words full of love, doubts, and fears. In Virginia's stories and essays it is possible to see her pain, particularly related to her mental disorders that, not only influenced her everyday life, but also her writing and her characters. She saw herself reflected in the characters in her works, who exude depression and skepticism, and in whom suicidal ideas and fear of people are recurrent. Hers was a life full of suffering and anxiety, and that is clear from the several attempts of suicide. By analyzing the author's life it is easy to recognize her mother's death as one of the reasons for her life complexity.

¹³ Virginia Woolf's biography information: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virginia-Woolf>

It could be possible to say that there is a casual link between grief and madness and the writer embodies the effect of this correlation¹⁴. Virginia suffered from a state of deep depression that led to two severe nervous breakdowns in May 1895 and February 1904, certainly caused by the loss of her parents. With the disappearance of her mother, a sense of security and protection are lost, and all that remains is a father with a particularly difficult temper. From this time on, and throughout her life, she often had migraines, nervous palpitations and heard voices that drive her to acts of madness. Adding to the already quite delicate situation is the sexual abuse suffered by her half-brother George. According to Victorian beliefs, woman was an emotionally unstable and weak being. If, moreover, she was intelligent, as in the case of our writer, the risk of “becoming insane” was extremely high. Dr. Savage, the family psychiatrist, was therefore convinced that the illness stemmed from physical stress and that the solution lay in a period of absolute rest, away from everyone, with a ban on writing and reading, convinced that intellectual activity was a bearer of madness¹⁵. When Virginia is resting, eating, and going to bed early she is well. The approaching war takes away what shred of stability she has left: the last moments of her life are marked by the fear of losing her mind completely and the obsessive noting of what was going on, from the sound of the planes to the bombings, to the impossibility of visiting her beloved London, to the collapse of the Hogarth Press and their own house. The war changed their lives even in the small everyday things. Woolf explored many typical themes of the modernist novel such anxiety, crisis, and communication difficulties, but she also dealt with issues remarkably close to her own such as loneliness, the distinction between dreams and reality, mental illness, and prejudice against women that prevented them from expressing their identity. Virginia Woolf rejects conventional narrative techniques, the events that build a story are no longer important just as chronological time and external reality do not matter, what matters is psychological time, the life of the character’ minds, where past, present, and future overlap. The omniscient narrator disappears and the point of view shifts to the minds of the characters, where everything flows as a continuous stream and is rendered through flashback, associations of ideas, impressions, and temporary emotions. Unlike James Joyce, who expresses his characters’ thoughts through inner monologue sometimes carried to extreme consequences, Virginia Woolf controls the flow of thoughts while maintaining logical and grammatical order. The writer narrates her stories in the third person, giving the impression that there is a link between the outer and inner worlds. While Joyce uses epiphanies, that is, a moment of sudden spiritual revelation, Virginia Woolf uses what she calls ‘*moments of being,*’ that is rare moments of great intensity and perception that allow the characters to clearly see the reality of their

¹⁴ L. Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*. The Hogarth Press, London. 1959, p. 138.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf’ biography information: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virginia-Woolf>

condition¹⁶.

1.3 Virginia Woolf's works.

Virginia Woolf began writing professionally during a stay in Yorkshire, where she found inspiration to author an article on the Haworth Vicarage, a piece that she sent to the London newspaper *The Guardian*. She contributes to the newspaper with articles and reviews covering every subject, having also to deal with the critics. In 1905 she embarked on a collaboration with the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Throughout 1908 and 1909 her main employment is at the *Times Literary Supplement* and at *Cornhill Magazine*, where she had the possibility to give vent to her originality with articles of a completely new kind. The early years of Woolf's work are one of apprenticeship, experimentation, and awareness of the crisis in literary tradition and beyond.

In March 1915 '*The Voyage Out*' was published, her first novel, begun after the death of her brother Thoby, to overcome the tragedy. Indeed, Woolf's manic-depressive worries led her to a suicide attempt in September 1913 and due to that the publication of '*The Voyage Out*' was delayed¹⁸. The novel came out after years of revisions, rewrites and above all insecurities and despondency. A work that is still very conventional, with a recognizable plot, clearly delineated characters, a time, and place, although the first new elements are beginning to be seen. The effort of writing is soon repaid by a positive reception, with excellent reviews from both friends and the press.

1917 Mr. and Mrs. Woolf founded Hogarth Press and in a noticeably brief time gave to the press their book, *Two Stories*, consisting of "*The Mark on the Wall*" by Virginia and Leonard's "*Three Jews*", received positively though by a restricted given the few copies printed.

In 1919 '*Night and Day*' appears, written in one of the most difficult periods, in that one hour a day she is allowed to write during her hospitalization in the clinic. Authoring this novel allows her to channel her thoughts into something positive and light and not constantly thinking about hallucinations.

In 1922 Woolf devoted herself to authoring a novel called '*Jacob's Room*', a major break from the earlier novels. The innovation consists in the elimination of the plot, one of the elements characteristics of the tradition. There is no longer the recording of an unambiguous reality, the result of a connection of cause and effect, but a multiple, uncertain, and irrational truth. Added to this, there is the presentation of a single character through flashes chronologically nonlinear.

These works were followed in 1925 by "*Mrs. Dalloway*", considered one of the cornerstones

¹⁶ S. B. Smith, *Reinventing Grief Work*. Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), p. 310.

of literary modernist. This novel allows Virginia to address the theme of illness, one of the most principal issues in her life, through a character who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after watching a friend die in the war. The figure of Septimus gives her the opportunity to externalize all those sufferings she has to suffer not only from the illness itself but also from the inability of the doctors who did not even try to listen to her, minimizing the seriousness of the situation and making her stay at rest. *Mrs. Dalloway* is characterized by the stream of consciousness of two characters, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, whose connection is difficult to understand at first. The two live parallel lives in London without even meeting until the end of the novel when Clarissa, who is told of Septimus's end, empathizes with him.

Time in this novel is not the one marked by the clock but that of their interiority, it is the emotions that guide the actors on stage. Mrs. Dalloway had been a success and from that moment she started to write both challenging and soft text such as *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *A Room of One's own*, *Flush*, *The Waves* and *The Years*.

To the Lighthouse, released in 1927, is considered by many to be her masterpiece and her most autobiographical work. It stems from the need to share nostalgic moments of her childhood, even though it involved bringing up many traumas not overcome and that led to a long moment of breakdown. The autobiographical reference is evident also in her personal diary where the author explicit how writing the *Lighthouse* brought the thoughts of her parents on her mind and how those thoughts were coming back differently. In the same passage she admits her obsession with both understanding how writing the novel was helping her curing that unhealthy fixation.

"I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing the Lighthouse laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true—that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and writing of them was a necessary act.) He comes back now more as a contemporary. I must read him some day."¹⁷

The novel chronicles the Ramsay family's vacation at their summer home on the Isle of Skye, during a ten-year time span. When Mrs. Ramsay and one of their children die, the children return there now finding the place completely changed. The text opens with the idea of a trip to the lighthouse which, postponed because of the harsh weather, is only realized at the end of novel when by then Mr. Ramsay, wracked with grief at the loss of his wife, is left alone with his children. Only then Lily Briscoe, in a moment of revelation, manage to find that insight that allows her to complete the picture begun many years later. Despite her disappearance, Mrs. Ramsay continues to exert her strength: she exemplifies a woman's ability to remain as an immortal figure, inside and outside the family. With her death come all the feelings, including a sense of emptiness and the resentment

¹⁷ David Garret, Virginia Woolf, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer, 1965), p. 372.

towards a tyrannical and self-centered father, that Virginia herself experiences upon her mother's death. The point of reference for everyone is the lighthouse, the light that shows the fleetingness of the moment that is also fixed and certain, a play of light and shadow that guides their consciousness.

The 1928 is the year of '*Orlando: A Biography*'. Written as a distraction after the last novel and it was born as a biography of the friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. The text plays on sexual ambiguity: Orlando is a young man who, after a deep sleep lasting several days, finds himself in the body of a woman. The figure of Orlando allows Virginia to address the theme of the androgynous and recount the experiences of life through both male and female point of view. The protagonist adjusts easily to the new life by exploring his/her condition. The moment Orlando realizes that something has changed is when he wears women's clothes, noticing a different reaction from people towards him/her that causes a change in the attitude. Woolf here is playing with the character and is reflecting deeply about what a biographer should do while writing. She expresses a multiplicity of the self that are not present all at the same time, but they appear on separate occasions, responding to different situations. The self not as a unity but as a layer of experiences inflicting on the present moments. In fact, during modernism there was the idea that the Avant-garde of that period was connected to the partiality of visions and idea of life in different portions rather than one picture. Modernism sees subjects as based on fragmentation, where integrity is an illusion.

'*A Room of One's Own*,' published in 1929, is a work that grew out of two lectures on women and fiction given at Cambridge. In the essay, the writer examines several issues: sexual inequality, the difficulty for women to access education, women's writing and condemn the overreaction of the feminist movement. Basing to her experience, the author deals with a woman's need for a room of her own, a space where she can pursue her passions. An original and revolutionary text that was created in a period where women were seen only as wives and mothers. The women, unable to support herself on her own. Was forced to marry and depend on the husband. According to Virginia, women must be able to have the same economic and social opportunities.

In 1931 Virginia published '*The Waves*', a work that was born from a letter sent to Vanessa where she explained how a moth, once it entered her house, started to be attracted to the fire that could have burned the animal. It is the most experimental novel by Virginia Woolf; the six characters are consciences that do not tell a story but express themselves in a kind of monologue. These entities develop individually yet remain bound together from their shared childhood.

In 1933 she published a minor work until 1937, year in which she published *The Years*, a text that was born in the years of the World War II, in a climate of distrust and disquiet. Virginia was almost reaching the end of her career and her life. Through this work she returns to her initial form

of expression with a narrator and a traditional setting to narrate the lives of three generations of the family Partiger.

At the same time Roger Fry died and his sister Margery asked Virginia to write his biography. Woolf was a particularly good friend of him, so she agreed and in the biography was published in 1940.

The last work written by Virginia Woolf was '*Between the Acts*', written in the most critical year of the war and left on the table along the letter to Leonard when Virginia decided to take her own life.

CHAPTER 2

Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse: an analysis

2.1 Mrs. Dalloway

But now what do I feel about my writing? - this book, that is, *The Hours*, if that's its name? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoyevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity, and insanity; I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense.¹

Mrs. Dalloway, originally titled *The Hours*, is one of the most important and revolutionary novels by Virginia Woolf. She started the journey that led to *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1922, finishing the novel in 1924 and publishing it in 1925. On October 14th Virginia wrote in her diary that “Mrs. Dalloway has branched into a book: and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side - something like that”.² She was indeed anticipating one of the reasons why this novel really makes a difference in those who read it. Describing her future work as a “study of insanity and suicide,” topics that, even though they seem far from reality, are in fact an important and significant part of our everyday life, especially in the life of the author herself who, overwhelmed by the pain of mental illness, took her own life. The novel may be known best for the presence of the stream of consciousness, a literary technique where the character's thoughts and feelings are depicted in a continuous flow that is never interrupted. Due to Woolf's experimentation, the theme and meaning could be less obvious on a first reading.³ The reader indeed is immediately, from page one, plunged into Mrs. Dalloway's mind and thoughts, having access not only to what she is thinking and feeling in that moment, but also to what she thought thirty-three years earlier. In fact, the storyline takes place on a single day that is dated Wednesday, thirteenth of June 1923. It opens with early morning, and it goes through to late night of a London day on which, at the end, the main character Clarissa Dalloway, gives a large formal party. It begins and ends with Clarissa as it narrates a day in her life. The novel begins with Clarissa buying some flowers for the party that she is organizing. Suddenly, an unexpected event occurs, a car emits an explosive noise and, moreover,

¹ L. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*. The Hogarth Press, London. 1959, p. 57.

² Ralph Samuelson, *The Theme of “Mrs. Dalloway”*, *Chicago Review* Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter, 1958). Published by *Chicago Review*, p. 57.

³ Elaine Showalter, *Introduction on Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019).

everyone's attention gets caught by a plane passing. Soon after she returns home, where she meets Peter Walsh after many years. Peter is her former lover, whom she refused to marry when she was only eighteen, choosing to wed to Richard Dalloway, her actual husband and father of their daughter, Elizabeth. After Peter and Clarissa's conversation, the perspective switches and the narrator starts to report and describe Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, also known as shellshock. He is waiting with his wife, Lucrezia, to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Sir William Bradshaw. It would be correct to say that Clarissa and Septimus are the main and most important characters, nevertheless the perspective does not only focus on their mind. Indeed, after the presentation of Septimus, the narrator shifts to Richard Dalloway who wants to go back home to tell Clarissa, his wife, that he loves her. Even though Clarissa is often doubting her decision to marry Richard, she has chosen the life she leads, and she does not repudiate it, in fact she seems to depend upon Richard for her very survival,⁴ The novel's perspective shifts back to Septimus, who must go to a psychiatric hospital. Due to the desperation and the difficult isolation, Septimus decides to kill himself by jumping out of a window and becoming impaled on a fence. At this point, the day is over, and the narration flows back to Clarissa's perspective during her expected party. She is busy entertaining her guests when Sir Willian Bradshaw arrives and announces that one of his patients, Septimus, has killed himself. At this point Clarissa, who was at first annoyed by this kind of information discussed at her party, starts to identify with what Septimus must have felt. She respects him for choosing death over adapting his soul and not preserve his identity, something that Clarissa feels and lives. She then returns to the party and the novel ends with a conversation between Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, whom characters were the one that, in some way, have animated Clarissa during her adolescence making her question her past, future, and present. Elaine Showalter explains in her introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway*⁵ how Clarissa's mind, although she is fifty-two, keeps returning to the past, to when she was eighteen and involved in an adolescent romance with Peter Walsh. She is obsessed with these memories and with her decision not to marry him, in part because Peter is coming back to London from India and, in part, because her daughter, Elizabeth, is turning eighteen and re-leaving what her mother felt and lived in another generation. On the other hand, the character of Selly Seton, really puts Clarissa as an adolescent through a significant questioning about her sexuality. Selly Seton was indeed her first kiss with a woman and the character refers to the event as the "most exquisite moment of her life" (38). This remembered love between women seems much freer and richer than any of her feelings for men. Like many sensitive characters in Woolf's

⁴ E. Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019). page xix.

⁵ E. Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xiii.

fiction, she understands her own capacities for bisexuality and sympathizes with them in other people.⁶

The innovative aspect of *Mrs. Dalloway* is surely the structure and techniques used by Woolf to narrate and present different themes and stories. Woolf developed her own psychological method of explaining ideas, memories, and feelings. She makes brilliant use of flashbacks and fragments from childhood's experiences – all images that have stayed in the character's consciousness. And the most interesting part is that she does not intervene with any narrative explanation, but she gives the memory itself.⁷ While reading the novel the author passes through the character's mind moving flawlessly and without being afraid of not being understood, translating into written words every sentence that the characters create in their head reproducing in an innovative way how our mind works. Point of view changes from one character's stream of consciousness to another often in a single paragraph.

“Elizabeth rather wondered whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next them; then, when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake - the pink one. The pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and then to be baffled even in that! When people are happy they have a reserve, she had told Elizabeth, upon which to draw, whereas she was like a wheel without a tyre (she was fond of such metaphors), jolted by every pebble - so she would say staying on after the lesson, standing by the fireplace with her bag of books, her 'satchel', she called it, on a Tuesday morning, after the lesson was over. And she talked too about the war. After all, there were people who did not think the English invariably right. There were books. There were meetings. There were other points of view. Would Elizabeth like to come with her to listen to So-and-so? (a most extraordinary-looking old man). Then Miss Kilman took her to some church in Kensington and they had tea with a clergyman. She had lent her books. Law, medicine, politics, all professions are open to women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. But for herself, her career was absolutely ruined, and was it her fault? Good gracious, said Elizabeth, no”.⁸

The passage quoted above perfectly exemplifies the idea of passing from one mind to another by presenting and narrating the thoughts of every character. In this case the two interested minds are the ones of Miss Kilman and Elizabeth. The passage starts with Elizabeth's thoughts about Miss Kilman's hunger, subsequently she jumps to Miss Kilman's mind and her wish of Elizabeth going with her, finishing then with Elizabeth's thoughts. Woolf often describes the interior thoughts of characters using third-person singular pronouns, a technique also called free indirect discourse. This technique ensures that transitions between the thoughts of many characters are smooth. Woolf's

⁶ Elaine Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xxi.

⁷ L. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*. The Hogarth Press, London. 1959, p. 52.

⁸ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Penguin Classics, United Kingdom, 2019. Page 142 -143.

psychological notation also reflected the thinking of modernist philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson⁹ divides time in two fractions: the first one, the historical time, is external, linear, and measured in terms of the spatial time as for example a clock; while the second one refers to the psychological time that is interior, subjective, and measured by the relative emotional intensity of a moment. He suggested that thoughts or feelings could be measured in terms of the number of perceptions, memories, and associations. For Woolf, an external perception that might be only a brief flash of chronological time can have an impact upon the individual consciousness that has a much greater duration and meaning. Indeed, Virginia Woolf engages a modernist perspective, breaking up the narrative plane and summing up in her novel multiple perspectives of the same individuals. She tries to show us her characters from different points of view rather than from the fixed perspective of an omniscient narrator.¹⁰ While writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf reread the Greek classics and the works of new modernist writers such as James Joyce. She reported her reading in her diary explaining how she was interested in their writing styles and their themes, such as psychology and time.¹¹ She wanted to change from the static characters and narrate about men and women that were able to react to their surroundings in ways that mirrored the human life and experience. The Great War had recently ended when she started authoring the novel, and the entire world, including London, was going through a radical political and social change. The British Empire was under question and the enormous atrocities that people had to live started to weigh over the citizens' shoulders. The mental and physical consequences were evident and difficult to manage and, even though the society was trying to recover from the war, the shifts were present and expanding. *Mrs. Dalloway* is the representation of after-war England. A novel that portrays the shifting political atmosphere and, at the same time, describes and criticizes the domestic sphere. She presents Clarissa Dalloway from every point of view, giving the possibility to the reader to take seriously the character without only thinking about her as a snob or as vain. Furthermore, Woolf's struggles during her life gave her the possibility to witness different medical professionals and their treatment, adding to the novel the theme of mental illness and insanity.

2.1.1 Mrs. Dalloway: the characters

The main characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* might be associated with the two figures of Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus. Two different human beings that never cross each other until the end of the book, where, with his death, Septimus makes a difference in Clarissa's world without even meeting her.

⁹ E. Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xxxiv.

¹⁰ L. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*. The Hogarth Press, London. 1959, p. 59.

¹¹ V. Bell, Misreading "Mrs. Dalloway". *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 94.

The novel hides a deeper reality, it presents a normal day that everyone could live and experience. Every character has its own role, its own background and story. The narration of human beings that throughout life have the fortune to cross and be in touch with several souls whom, without even knowing or wanting, changed their entire way of seeing and living the world. That is why it is important to understand and analyze all the characters inhabiting the pages of Virginia Woolf's masterpiece.

Mrs. Dalloway is one of the most ambiguous figures presented by Woolf. Vereen Bell in his text "Misreading Mrs. Dalloway" underlines how Clarissa Dalloway could be associated with a unifying device around which the other characters cohere.¹² Clarissa is surely full of strength and intuitiveness. Virginia Woolf represents her with extreme honesty, producing in the reader both the feeling of identification and the idea of reading about a snob, vain and repressed woman, a woman that at the end is a normal person living a normal life. *Mrs. Dalloway* is clearly a critique of the English society in the year 1923, Clarissa is no exception. She indeed shows her privilege through a critical examination of the governing class at the turning-point of its power¹³. Clarissa is not the main protagonist because she offers a traditional hero's alternative social vision, but because she optimizes the best and worst of the prevailing one.¹⁴ She likes to picture herself at social events assuming a pose of extreme dignity when, for instance, she imagines herself in the presence of the Queen. She is a snob, a reserved and sensitive snob that tries to fit into a society that is changing and that has been setting roles and social rules throughout all history. Clarissa might appear even more cruel when the reader reads about the party and how she interacts with her guests.¹⁵ For instance, Clarissa's lack of empathy to Ellie Henderson's discomfort and loneliness at the party makes her seem indifferent and not caring of other people's feelings and emotions. Clarissa indeed is only interested in having a great night, underling how "She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all flattening flat. Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly, standing in a bunch at a corner like Ellie Henderson, not even caring to hold themselves upright".¹⁶ She is obsessed with what people in society might think of her, and this anxiety underlies her concern over the success of her party.¹⁷ Clarissa thinks of her party as a way of bringing people together, even though the people invited sound boring and, of course, snob. Peter and Sally, during their conversation at the end of the novel, remark how snob and hard Clarissa is on people she does not like. Nevertheless, she was generous

¹² E. Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xv.

¹³ V. Bell, "Misreading 'Mrs. Dalloway'". *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Winter, 2006). Page 96.

¹⁴ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019. The description of the party goes from page 181 until the end of the novel.

¹⁵ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 184

¹⁶ V. Bell, "Misreading 'Mrs. Dalloway'". *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 97.

¹⁷ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 210.

to her friend and *pure-hearted*.¹⁸ Clarissa is fifty-two in the novel, and although she has reached everything she had wished for, during the day her mind continuously fights with memories and thoughts about her past. She has been ill, and the nature of her illness is left unclear. The illness being mentioned makes us understand that Mrs. Dalloway has gone through suffering and had to deal with a possible death. Clarissa might seem unbroken and strong but by analyzing her story it is understandable how she is fragile and doubtful about her life and her soul. She had experienced sexuality and different types of loves that influenced her way of perceiving man and marriage. The character of Sally Seaton for example made her question her sexuality and her idea of love. She remembers her kiss with Sally as something memorable, bringing to the character an undiscounted bisexual side. Yet, these musings about the nature of her sexuality seem less an expression of Clarissa's lesbianism than an effort to understand a sexual dimension in her life that feels lost. She and Richard are no longer sharing a bedroom and their sexual relations have ceased.¹⁹ Moreover, her decision of not marrying Peter often makes her question her marriage and the life she has built. What could it be if she had chosen Peter over Richard? What kind of life would she have lived? What would other people have thought about her? Despite the doubts she is conscious of her decisions because by choosing Richard she chose the life she is living. She wanted to have an exact position in the English society, and she knew who she had to marry. She is a woman, a normal human being who is living a life that sometimes does not fit her completely. She indeed, at the end of the novel, associates herself with the death of a man who decides to kill himself. She somehow admires him because Clarissa understands that with his death, he refuses to adapt to a society that does not accept him for what he is. He decides to not play any characters that is not himself; so as not to live a fake life, he prefers to disappear and make every suffering stop. Clarissa feels the act of suicide really close to her decisions and the way she is living her life; she in fact decides to act as the character of Mrs. Dalloway, a strong and respected woman, in a society that sometimes does not make her feel like herself. She has lived for what Peter had called "the death of her soul". This moment in the novel represents perfectly the idea of moment of being, a sudden revelation of what life is for the character and how she is able to give significance to an event that seems far from her reality but that, at the end, relates to her as to everybody else.

The other main half of the novel is occupied by the story of Septimus Smith, who decides to kill himself and who serves as Clarissa's double. He is linked to Clarissa through his anxiety and his marriage, his anguish about mortality and immortality. Septimus Warren Smith is a disturbed young

¹⁸E. Showalter, Introduction on Mrs. Dalloway, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xxxv.

¹⁹ E. Showalter, Introduction on Mrs. Dalloway, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xxxvii.

war veteran, and he is specifically connected with the war and all the changes that it brought. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf criticizes the new social system and all the major changes, including the people's ability to cope with change as, for instance, the passage from war to peace. Septimus is the symbolic case of the *shellshock* effect also known as the post-traumatic disorder. Different passages in the novel describes Septimus living with different forms of male hysteria such as anguish, immobility, hallucinations, depression, and insomnia. A widespread early military reaction to *shellshock* was to condemn it as a form of cowardice and fear.²⁰ The idea was that men must learn how to repress their feelings to not seem weak. The War traditionally spread the idea that mourning was feminine and unpatriotic, promoting the more manly virtues of fortitude and devotion to duty, causing anxieties about masculinity, and any sign of emotion such as tears would be interpreted as pathological.²¹ When his best friend Evans is killed during the war, Septimus "stopped showing any emotions or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonable".²² After the war ended, he could not feel. He was in Milan, and he was falling insane. He asked Lucrezia, a young Italian girl, to marry him, hoping to feel something again. In fact, his mind was still fighting some demons, he was living in his own world, seeing, and imagining things that other could not: "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning".²³ A voice constantly communicates with him, telling him he is the messiah, and the natural world speaks to him through codes and signals. He thinks he can hear people's evil thoughts and often he finds himself talking alone to some souls that do not exist. Septimus is not just a sensitive man traumatized by the war; he is also suffering of mental illness that somehow can be connected to Woolf's relationship with her depression and breakdowns. The figure of Septimus also gave the author the possibility to criticize and discuss the theme of unhappy experiences with doctors and their methods, such as a strict diet, complete bed rest and isolation, which led the character to death. Mental illness does not only hit the interested person, but influences people around the patient, in Septimus' case the character of Lucrezia, called also Rezia, is the one that most suffers from the situation. She is losing her husband, who is slowly dragging her into his darkness. He would argue with her about committing suicide together²⁴ explaining how wicked people were making her feel bad about her life. Rezia tries in every way to help her husband and to make him understand that she is unhappy but, of course, there is no way out of his mental illness. Elaine Showalter describes Septimus as a scapegoat, whose visionary emotional turbulence and lack

²⁰ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 95.

²¹ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 97.

²² V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 73.

²³ E. Showalter, Introduction on *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xliii.

²⁴ R. Samuelson, The Theme of "Mrs. Dalloway", *Chicago Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter, 1958). Published by Chicago Review, p. 63.

of psychic defenses has to be seen in contrast to the fatuousness, insensitivity, impassivity, and self-protective caution of the dominant codes. Septimus feels so much because the others feel so little.²⁵ Both Clarissa and Septimus are going through a conflict between the individual and the society, the major difference is that in Septimus this conflict has reached serious proportions.²⁶ The death of Septimus is announced during Clarissa's party by the doctor himself. And even if Clarissa understands his solution and feels somehow very much like him, she still can feel the beauty of life. The difference in generation between Clarissa and Septimus is that his life was ruined by the war while Clarissa's generation, too old to fight, had *died* for other reasons.²⁷ It would be possible to say that Septimus is the reminder of what is always around the corner for each of us: madness, tragedy, and death.²⁸

Continuing the character's analysis, it is essential to explain the role and presence of Peter Walsh, a middle-aged man that somehow is afraid of having wasted his life by making the wrong decisions. Peter is described by Woolf as *elderly*²⁹ while he presents himself at Clarissa's house, when they see each other after an exceptionally long time. He is a man that responds to ageing differently, trying to recapture his sense of youth in a romance with a married woman in India, a woman young enough to be his daughter.³⁰ He cannot really decide what he feels, and he often tries to impose himself to feel or not feel some emotions; for instance, he spends the day clarifying to himself that he does not love Clarissa anymore, even though when he is in her presence he cannot deny or stop his obsession. He often recalls and narrates his past and his meeting with Clarissa, and how they almost got married. He suffers from Clarissa's decision to marry Richard and he often criticizes him and the England social system that influenced Clarissa's behavior. The reality is that his self-obsession and neediness would have drown Clarissa, and that is one of the reasons why she decided to marry Richard, who gives her the right spaces and time. By reading the novel it is possible to understand how the character of Peter really puts Clarissa's decisions in discussion and his appearance leads her to think and analyze her past and present. Peter's role in the novel is similar to the one of Sally Seton, the girlhood friend of Mrs. Dalloway – another character that arrived in Clarissa's life bringing questions and experiences out of the comfort zone that is the British social class.

Sally's figure appears most of the time just thanks to Clarissa's memories until the end of the

²⁵ Anna S. Benjamin, *Towards an Understanding of the Meaning of Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway"*. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1965), p. 222.

²⁶ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 43.

²⁷ E. Showalter, *Introduction on Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019), p. xiv.

²⁸ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 35.

²⁹ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 37.

³⁰ D. Garnett, *Virginia Woolf*, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer, 1965), p. 382.

novel when, during the party, she shows up again elderly but still familiar. Clarissa remembers the moment when Sally kissed her as a sudden revelation. For a moment, she had seen an illumination and brought her to question in the future her feelings and how, at the end, her relationship with Sally had been, after all, love.³¹

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it has a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprung from a sense of being in a league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's.³²

Sally and Peter had surely been what Clarissa was not searching for her life. They were adventure and novelty. They were insecurities and passion. They were also instability and judgment. Clarissa as a girl had her chance to change her life completely but, at the end, she chooses what someone could call a wrong turning, who failed to realize her highest potentialities by sticking tightly to the tradition of her class. Her irresponsible friend Sally and the ex-lover Peter Walsh, who awakened her mind, but whom she had rejected, represent somehow the intellectuals who value personal freedom and spontaneity and truth over social and monetary success.³³ The novel ends with Peter and Sally having a conversation about Clarissa, and that is one of the most interesting parts of the novel: closing the scenario with the two most controversial people Clarissa had in her life while they remember her for what she used to be and for what, after all these years, is now.

Indeed, Clarissa has a side of herself that the reader can easily judge and criticize. It is nothing new that Clarissa is a snob, and her lack of empathy is present and evident towards people who are not from the same social class as her. Here is where the character of Miss Kilman is introduced. Clarissa's harshest critic is Doris Kilman, who dislikes and fears Clarissa not only for who she is but for the attitudes of the class she represents.³⁴ Doris Kilman is the opposite of Clarissa: she is unattractive, poor, un-English, and religious. Even though she can be identified with the enemy of Clarissa, that does not mean that her vision of Mrs. Dalloway is not right. She entered the Dalloway family thanks to Richard, who employed her as their daughter's history tutor. She is German, over forty, and she *pitied women* as Clarissa Dalloway.

She pitied and despised them from the bottom of her heart, as she stood on the soft carpet, looking at the old engraving of a little girl with a muff. With all this luxury going on, what hope was there for

³¹ D. Garnett, Virginia Woolf, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer, 1965), p. 384.

³² S. B. Smith, *Reinventing Grief Work*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), p. 314.

³³ V. Bell, *Misreading "Mrs. Dalloway"*. *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p. 100.

³⁴ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 136.

a better state of things? Instead of lying on a sofa [...] she should have been in a factory; behind a counter; Mrs. Dalloway and all the others fine ladies.³⁵

On the other hand, also Clarissa has no sympathy for Doris Kilman. Indeed, even if in the novel it is not specifically expressed, it is easy to understand that Miss Kilman is in love and possessive towards Elizabeth, Clarissa, and Richard's daughter. She fears that Elizabeth is in danger of repeating her mother's life and she wishes something more meaningful for her.³⁶ She is genuinely concerned about Elizabeth, she took her to church with her, she lends her books, and she often reminds her that "she must not let parties absorb her".³⁷ On one hand, it is difficult to blame Doris's thoughts about Elizabeth's mother; Clarissa is aware of Miss Kilman's influence on her daughter, and she is jealous of her, nevertheless she still puts her party as one of her priorities. Miss Kilman has a strong faith in God and tries to make Elizabeth understand that over her daily life there is a world in need. Elizabeth never really thought about the poor because she has always lived with everything she wanted. She starts to see Miss Kilman with different eyes, gaining awareness based on her stories and her life that are completely different from what she is used to. "Miss Kilman was quite different from any one she knew; she made one feel small".³⁸ The shifting point of view used in the novel really helps us to understand different character's stories, and Miss Kilman is one of the best examples. In the passages devoted to her, we learn so much about her: she struggled to educate and make something of herself, she lost her brother, and she was a German during one of the worst possible historical moments. She is socially graceless, and incapable of small talk and she also became a Christian thanks to a sympathetic minister that pitied her and tried to help her find comfort in identifying with the suffering of Christ. She liked people who were ill, and she wanted to be a doctor or a farmer. Miss Kilman is indeed an important figure that helps us to see more clearly a different version of Clarissa, that is in this case an enemy that, at the end, always wins. In fact, at the end of her interactions with Elizabeth, Doris feels that Clarissa somehow had triumphed, Elizabeth had gone away with her beauty and youth.³⁹ Elizabeth is often described in the novel with sexual references. She is a flower that has not seen the sun, meaning a young woman that is still a virgin. She is blooming sexually and socially entering the phase of adolescence: "She was always charming to look at [...], every man fell in love with her, and she was awfully bored. For it was beginning".⁴⁰ Elizabeth is repeating her mother's story. She is blooming and experiencing; her odd

³⁵ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p. 136.

³⁶ V. Bell, *Misreading "Mrs. Dalloway"*. *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), p.101.

³⁷ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p 144.

³⁸ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p 143.

³⁹ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p 143.

⁴⁰ V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Princeton University. United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 2019, p 148.

relationship with Miss Kilman recalls Clarissa and Sally's relationship and her new approach to society, party and, in the close future, men will bring Elizabeth to choose her future and her position in society. The story of a mother and a daughter, where the daughter is always somehow the continuous of her mother.

Mrs. Dalloway is indeed a union of different stories, minds, and backgrounds. The author is incredibly able to connect every character, giving them an important and significant role that helps us to understand, not only the general one-day story, but also the figure of Clarissa and her facets. Every story is connected and giving us more than the narration of a single day, but the vision of life through different eyes.

2.2 To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf published *To the Lighthouse* in 1927 and, along with her precedent novels *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway*, it emerged after the finish of the Great War along with the society's recovery. It is one of her most successful works referring also to the stream-of-consciousness technique. The book is divided into three sections that take place from 1910 to 1920 rotating around the members of the Ramsay family during their visit to their summer residence on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. It could be possible to refer to this novel as an autobiographical novel; several are the references to Virginia's life events starting from the death of her mother to the difficult relationship with her father, depicted and described in her work. The title is mainly symbolic, and its plot is secondary to the philosophical aim that the author has. The novel itself is an explicit statement of a way of looking at life, achieving its greatest glories and its best insights⁴¹. The first part of the text is called *The Window* and it is where we are introduced to the Ramsay family, their guests, and their visit to the summer house. James, the youngest child of Mrs. Ramsay, wants to visit the lighthouse that he sees through the window of their house, but his father denies him the permission to go because of the harsh weather. Mrs. Ramsay does not want to make her child feel sad and disappointed, so she promises him that if when the weather is fine, they would visit the lighthouse. Of course, the visit to the lighthouse would not happen until the end of the book, ten years later. In this first part of the novel, we are also introduced to Lily Briscoe, a young woman that is not related to the Ramseys but that is somehow part of the family. In the novel she is painting a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay even if she is unable, due to several issues, to complete her work. *The Window* part plays the role of a screen between reality and the unconscious mind of the characters. It shows us the outer world, where words and actions act like a window through which

⁴¹ S. H. Derbyshire, An Analysis of Mrs. Woolf's "To the Lighthouse". *College English*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Jan. 1942),p. 353

we can see the inner thinking and personalities of the different characters in the novel⁴². The second part, *Time Passes*, is set ten years after the first one and it is the shortest part of the novel. The author describes the devastating effect of time on the life of certain characters and most of all on the summer house that is un-lived and controlled just by Mrs. McNab, the cleaning lady, whom point of view is presented during the narration together with an omniscient narrator. The First World War begins and ends during these ten years and Mrs. Ramsey, with also two of her children, dies. This chapter represents somehow the struggle between the forces of existence, order, death, and chaos. Death, indeed, as a natural force tries to take over the house but is hampered at first by the personal objects and clothes of the Ramsay family, and then by Mrs. McNab attention and care for the house. Humanity begins to reclaim its possessions and imposes its will upon the house⁴³. Comparing to the first and last sections, Virginia Woolf really changes and modifies her way of writing in the middle part of the novel. The air and the wind entering the house bring to the novel a deep silence that is opposed to the confusion of thoughts present in the first chapter. An opposite world full of sadness, anger, and a sense of neglect. This is one of the most touching passages inside the novel, precisely because the author can transmit and convey the feelings of a family that is mourning. Woolf brings nature as a character personifying her and accompanying her inside a house that needs love and warmth.

“Did nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his miser, condoned his meanness, and acquiesced in his torture⁴⁴.”

Virginia Woolf compares the house to nature several times, for example referring to it as *a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it* (page 132), giving the idea of an awoken nature that breaths and is alive. Darkness has taken the rein of the house during those ten years and only the Lighthouse, sometimes, enters the rooms for a moment, looking at the untouched clothes and dusty ornaments that remained intact as Mrs. Dalloway and her children could, one day, come back to retake everything they had left behind. The third part called *The Lighthouse* is set ten years after the first chapter and it narrates the return of the Ramsey family to the summer house. It develops the story of Lily Briscoe through her early morning encounter with Mr. Ramsey. Lily feels very separate from him and unable to give him what he seems to need: sympathy and

⁴² S. Salam, Khan, S.A. & K. Ahmad, A psychoanalytical reading of Mrs. Ramsay, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ), 2022, p. 253.

⁴³ S. H. Derbyshire, An Analysis of Mrs. Woolf's "To the Lighthouse". College English, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Jan. 1942), pp. 354.

⁴⁴ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*. Penguin Classics, United Kingdom, 2020, p. 129.

understanding. From this point the story builds on two parallel lines. The first concerns Lily painting her picture that she had left unfinished inside the old house, and the development in her consciousness of the value of Mrs. Ramsay's personality and what life means⁴⁵. The second line develops the journey of James, Paul, Cam, and Mr. Ramsey to the Lighthouse. In this part we explore the grown-up children's minds and their feelings towards their dad who, throughout all their childhood, has been strict and harsh while now, after her wife death, he acts and feels in a gentler and calm way. At the house, while the other part of the family is sailing, Lily stands in front of her painting disappointed with herself for not being able to help Mr. Ramsey. She starts to think about her life and her past decisions, her love life and why she never married. She is going through a process of understanding and mourning that is somehow acting as an obstacle that she needs to overcome. She is unable to paint with Mr. Ramsey around until, at the end, she understands the main aim of her painting: making something permanent. Recreating the emotions of a lifetime into marks giving shape to her thoughts and relationships with the Ramsey family. This sudden revelation gives Lily the possibility to finish her work triumphing over her insecurities no longer allowing anyone to control her. The relations of the family have been properly adjusted, the emotions have been re-arranged and placed in order: and Lily on the lawn, having at last achieved a right relationship with Mrs. Ramsey, and knowing that Mr. Ramsay, in reaching the lighthouse has attained a similar achievement, can finish her painting, has had her vision⁴⁶.

2.2.1 To the Lighthouse: the characters

As previously explained, the storyline of this novel is not the main subject of Woolf's writing. *To the Lighthouse* is an increasingly explicit statement of a way of looking life through different eyes. It is the story of a normal family that learn how to appreciate every moment and to love each other despite the current mistakes. It is, at the end, the story of every normal family. That is why understanding the characters' minds and view is necessary to appreciate this work. Every member of the family has diverse ways of perceiving life with a multitude of facets that, without the description of their thoughts, we would not be able to reach and comprehend.

One of the most significant figures in *To the Lighthouse* is undoubtedly Mrs. Ramsey. She is a mother, a wife, a loved and admired friend. She is introduced to the reader at the beginning of the novel not only as a woman but as a perfect figure of her kind, caring, tolerant and loving. She is the symbol of light and universal motherhood, bringing order and harmony to her household and

⁴⁵ S. H. Derbyshire, An Analysis of Mrs. Woolf's "To the Lighthouse". College English, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Jan. 1942), pp. 354-355.

⁴⁶P.W. Sharron, Lily Briscoe's Painting: A key to Personal Relationship in "To the Lighthouse". Criticism, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter 1971), p. 38.

neighborhood.⁴⁷ She brings unity and love to the people around her by being sympathetic and unselfish. The perfection of Mrs. Ramsey's character contrast somehow with the author's life, filled with suffering and obstacles. Every character is indeed a unique perspective of life even though Mrs. Ramsey gives the impression of Woolf's binary opposites. The character is always trying to spend her time bringing people together, she believes that woman's happiness lies in marrying and she tries to convince many of her surroundings to marry each other, as for instance Lily and Charles Tansley. A figure that was certainly not present in Virginia's life and that, because of its complexities, she could not adopt. Mrs. Ramsey is the central character of the novel and all the events of the story revolve around her. She is a present and attentive mother that does not want to see her children suffer. At the beginning of the first chapter, the little son James insists on going to the Lighthouse but, despite the father's denial, she consoles him very politely, promising the son that they would return giving him hope even if it was not true. She worries for her children and the impact of her own and her husband's actions. "Children never forget. For this reason, it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed," (p. 58) Mrs. Ramsey thinks. She is caring and always on the alert, reminding the reader the importance of our actions, and how every decision that we make could impact the day or the life of the ones surrounding us. She does not want to break their child's heart, a sensitive love that the author did not receive due to her mother's early death. Mrs. Ramsey symbolizes the universal motherhood protecting her child from bad memories, brining harmony, and peace. Despite the incredible characteristic of the character, Mrs. Ramsey represents on the other hand the opposite of what nowadays is called a feminist idea of woman. She indeed is a stay-at-home mother, taking care of the children, trying to maintain peace through silence and acceptance. On page 6 of the novel, Woolf presents a different vision of the mother's decisions from the point of view of her own daughters; they indeed think often about her *grey hair and managing things better*. The daughters think and hope for a different life, a wilder one, *not always taking care of some man or other* but, despite dreaming differently, they admire her and her decisions. Her personality influences other characters, such as Lily or Mr. Ramsey. For instance, Lily cannot understand Mrs. Ramsey easily but still feels her influence and impact during all her life. A psychoanalytic reading of Mrs. Ramsey's character reveals in part the troubled mental condition and painful life of Virginia Woolf, as we see thar Mrs. Ramsey too had so many problems and challenges in her world. Her inner peace and calm personality helped her to get through every situation, putting together all the broken pieces by connecting people. She is the picture of universal motherhood and womanhood⁴⁹. Mrs. Ramsey

⁴⁷ S. Salam, Khan, S.A. & K. Ahmad, A psychoanalytical reading of Mrs. Ramsay, Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ), 2022, p. 253.

dies without any known cause of death during the second part of the novel, leaving an enormous hole inside everybody's hearts, incapable of letting her go. Her husband, Mr. Ramsey, is the one that mostly will change attitude throughout the novel due to her wife's death.

Mr. Ramsey is on the other hand the opposite of his wife. Gruff and silent, he does not demonstrate his feelings even though they are present, and they do make a difference in his personality. Mr. Ramsey represents the stereotypical figure of the head of the household, strict and incapable of expressing his emotions. He is the one saying no to the children and deciding the rules of the house following a typical patriarchal imposition. This attitude leads the relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and his children to a sever estrangement, a break from the spontaneous love that should be present between a father and his children and that here is completely shattered. Despite the difficult relationship, the admiration and awareness of the father's role are still present in the Ramsey children.

his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgment. What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth: never tampered with a fact: never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children, who should be aware from childhood that life is difficult.⁴⁸

The shell covering Mr. Ramsey's feelings and emotions is easily taken down by the author. Woolf tries to present to the reader a complete version of the character showing how even the one that seems stronger and feelingless are, at the end, suffering human beings as everybody else. By saying that *To the Lighthouse* is an autobiographical novel we are referring exactly to this kind of characters. In fact, Woolf had to cope with a strong and cold father that was not able to give her the love she needed, contributing to her mental health and ruining, in part, their relationship. Mr. Ramsey acts as Virginia's father even though, thanks to the stream of consciousness and the ability of the author to represent life through different point of view, the reader can encounter another side of the severe father that only wants to make their children understand that life is difficult. Mr. Ramsey is indeed particularly insecure about himself and his relationships. On page 33 of the novel the vigorous father realizes that *he would never reach R* and, moreover, he would neither reach Z. The main idea behind these thoughts is that among millions of people in the world, not everyone is made to reach the maximum in life. That is impossible to be perfect and at the top and that if we are not that person in generations reaching Z, we do not have to blame ourselves. Mr. Ramsey has indeed *his own little light that would shine, not very brightly, for a year or two, and would then be merged in some bigger light, and that in a bigger still*. Mr. Ramsey represents the fragility of the

⁴⁸ V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*. Penguin Classics, United Kingdom, 2020, p. 4.

human being, a fragility hidden beneath the surface. The knowledge of a man that is aware of how his children hate him for looking down on them and interrupting them; for the exaltation and sublimity of his gestures and for ruining the simplicity and good sense that their mother brings. A man that, at the end of the day just wants to be assured of his genius and warmed, as everybody else. It is interesting to notice how the two parents, Mr. Ramsey and Mrs. Ramsey, have opposite characters and traits. Their relationship is a little complicated in terms of understanding each other because their approaches to life are different. Mr. Ramsey is a man of philosophy while his wife is a person who believes in human emotions and the importance of feelings⁴⁹. Their chemistry does not match on several grounds, but at the same time Mr. Ramsey needs and researches in his wife attention and support even if he is not able to express his feelings. The death of Mrs. Ramsey will affect her husband deeply, as everybody else in the family, making him change behavior at the end of the novel, where Mr. Ramsey decides to bring his grown-up children to the Lighthouse respecting her wife's wishes.

Another significant character presented in the story is Lily Briscoe. Lily is a passionate artist that decides to begin a portrait of Mrs. Ramsey at the beginning of the novel, a portrait full of problems and confusion that she will be able to resolve just at the end of the novel. She worries over the destiny and fate of her work, a fear that we see also in Mr. Ramsey. The fear of not reaching the set goals and not being able to honor them. The conventional idea of femininity that Mrs. Ramsey represents in the form of marriage and family confounds Lily that responds to the traditional ideas by rejecting them. The recurring memory of Charles Tansley commenting that woman cannot paint or write creates her anxiety that she will bring with her throughout the whole novel. This intrusive thought of not being able to do and create what she wants is a clear and simple example of what can easily happen in real life. It helps the reader to understand how prejudice and insignificant comments can influence the lives of a single person creating unnecessary insecurities. Despite the emotional hardship Lily faces, she indeed goes through an incredible transformation over the novel, evolving from a woman that cannot make sense of the shapes of her work into an artist who achieves her vision, overcoming anxieties and personal suffering. At the end of the novel, she finishes her portrait after ten years from the first brushstroke, creating something beautiful and immortal. The finished portrait is her way of overcoming grief and achieving a sense of completeness where she finally feels united with Mrs. Ramsey but also with Mr. Ramsey that, somehow, is more like Lily than one could expect.

Another character that helps the reader to see the Ramsey family from another prospective is

⁴⁹ S. Salam, Khan, S.A. & K. Ahmad, A psychoanalytical reading of Mrs. Ramsay, *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, 2022, p. 264.

the son James Ramsey. He is a sensitive child that since the beginning of the novel researches and depends on her mother's love and attention making him jealous and leading him to almost hate his father for ruining the peace and harmony that her mother brings. He feels a significant rage towards his father who, he believes, enjoys delivering unwelcome news such as not going to the Lighthouse. But when James grows into a young man and builds his personality, he shares several of his father's characteristics. When, at the end of the novel, they all sail to the Lighthouse, James, as his father, is moody and offended. He needs sympathy from others, the feel of being heard and loved. Leading to the Lighthouse James starts to recognize and understand the loneliness of his father that, somehow, also matches his personality. So, by the end of the trip, his attitude toward his father changes completely, accepting him and reaching a moment of completeness as happens to Lily while finishing her work.

Several are the other characters named throughout the story to make the reader understand how the Ramsey family was surrounded and loved by many faces and personality. *To the Lighthouse* is, at the end, the story of a simple family that goes through what every normal family must deal daily. The misunderstanding, the growth and the grief are events that happens normally, and Virginia Woolf was able to transform something common into something beautifully profound and significant. *To the Lighthouse* is the story of every one of us and how, sometimes, we are not able to see the people around us with different eyes.

CHAPTER 3

Time, Grief, and Family in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*

3.1 Time

As previously analyzed in this work, time is a central element in Woolf's work. In a moment of instability and deep crisis, chronological time, typical of the traditional novel, crumbles to make room for something more indefinite. A more intimate and personal approach to time that is no longer objective or conventional. Henry Bergson discusses this when he writes about duration, defining time as a continuous and unstoppable flow. Henri Bergson was a leading exponent of evolutionary spiritualism, a current of thought that arose in opposition to positivism. According to spiritualism, science cannot be absolutized as if it were the only certain form of knowledge, because the individual is also given the possibility of knowing a reality of a spiritual nature. Hence the importance assigned to consciousness and introspection. Bergson divides time in two fractions, the historical one and the psychological one; the first one follows the clock, is linear and external while the second is intern, subjective and follows the intensity of a moment. The time of science is reversible: an experiment can be repeated many times. The time of life is irreversible: a missed opportunity is no longer recoverable, an experience achieved is no longer modifiable. You cannot go back and redo what you did not do or change what you did wrong. Time in life is rendered by the term duration, that is, a single, flowing current, a flowing of states of mind. Unlike the time of science, for which each instant is external to the other, for the time of consciousness each moment is closely related to those that precede it and those that follow it. Feelings and thoughts are measured in terms of memories creating a unique description of the world around us. From a literary point of view, this new concept of time is reflected in the consciousness of the individual. It has the power to reshape it, distort it, following the incessant flow of memories, dreams, sensations. Virginia Woolf moves deftly through this jungle of thoughts, letting her pen guide her gently and nostalgically, shrinking and expanding time. She faced the theme of the passage of time and how it affects the existence of her characters. Time, in her stories, is represented in multiple ways: through the comparison of past and future, as in *To the Lighthouse*; or as a single, rich day in which different views of life intertwine and overlap through the unfolding of shared experiences as in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Time is an escapable dimension in this novel, which spans a single day, describing the thoughts of many of the characters and creating an incredible work that gives us the possibility to

see life from different perspectives. The one-day narration is sufficient to portray the complexity of life, the dominance of the minds and the tirelessness of thought that transcends space, mingling with memories. The circular method used by Woolf presents an organic world that is opposed to the traditional linear-outline form, which divides people and events giving importance just to the actions and the physical moments which are only the superficial expression of our reality. Time is the real protagonist; it is indeed impossible to overlook the detail related to the title that initially had to be “The Hours”. Each character comes to be characterized by their relationship with time. A time that is not only external, given by the author through dates or the chimes of the Big Ben; a time that overwhelms the reader, the inner time of each character. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the author uses a complicated structure that reveals the events in bits and pieces throughout the entire novel; the story is indeed not fully revealed until the last page.¹ It would be possible to divide the novel into three parts: the first one is composed by the beginning and the ending; the second part is made by the central event with the rejection scene at the fountain; finishing then with the thirty dead years. Woolf dealt with the problem of representing in words a time where any moment cannot be isolated, being part of a continuity in which present, past and future are inseparable.² We do not know the exact hour when the story begins but it is possible to assume that the hour being struck by the Big Ben (p.4) when the novel opens is 10.00 am, finishing the day at around midnight. When the time is stated exactly by the author it is to indicate the simultaneity of certain events, to provide a switch from a character to another, to provide transition from the present to the past and to suggest that some characters are bound together by time. Each of the characters have a past which bears upon and even creates the present and the future. The past is narrated through traditional flashbacks simplifying the events and locations and interrupting the present without implying the linking of interrelated places, living then in the past, present, and future. The revelation is not done in chronological order but according to the significance of the past to the present, changing in this way the traditional flashback technique. In fact, the order of the events is based on the way the author views time, creating a complete subordination of events to thoughts.³ Another interesting aspect of the novel regarding time is the omission of the thirty years that leads the reader to accept the fact that the narration of that period is not present, helping us to concentrate on the accomplishment and change happening during the actual narrative. Alongside the numerous themes of the novel, time finds its place also in the life of the characters and not only through the structure

¹Anna S. Benjamin, Towards an Understanding of the Meaning of Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway”. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1965), p. 215.

²Anna S. Benjamin, Towards an Understanding of the Meaning of Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway”. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1965), p. 216

³Anna S. Benjamin, Towards an Understanding of the Meaning of Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway”. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer, 1965), p. 218.

of the novel. Time is the one assaulting and crumbling life, leading to death. The novel rests on a balance between mortal time and the time of life's resolution in the face of death. Time is the path from life to death and is a warning of the caducity of existence itself. Time is an obsession for Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran that feels horror towards time. Septimus and Clarissa manage to turn time into a rhythm. Their controversial relationship with time will eventually respectively be resolved by suicide and attachment to life. Thus, Clarissa realizes, by facing the mortality of life, that she must for what she has.

Virginia Woolf's second novel analyzed in this thesis, *To the Lighthouse*, presents a completely different organization of its story. The work is divided into three parts, and it narrates the story of a simple family through a period of ten years. The first part, called *The Window*, describes the life of the Ramsey family for one summer. The time narrative is quite linear from a chronological point of view, but the intertwining of thoughts makes the reading both complex and deep. Here the reader experiences the relationships between the member of the family and the one who surrounds them. Life and time go on until the second part of the novel, titled *Time Passes*. *Time Passes* is objectively and physically the shortest part of the novel. Woolf resumes ten years of the Ramseys' life in twenty pages. Here time is described as a result of the years passing, leading to the beach house being always empty. In fact, since the mother's death, the Ramsey family stop going to the beach house, enclosing there all their things and, with them, their memories. Nature, creeping inside the abandoned house, moves next to dusty clothes, shoes, and photos that, stuck in time, have never been taken away. Time here is represented by the house itself which, forgotten by the family, remains motionless and frozen. The last part of the novel is called *The Lighthouse* and a ten-year time lap is experienced by the reader, in which the Ramsey family return to the beach house after years to relive past emotions while healing from the loss of the mother and siblings. The last part of Woolf's work is the most significant one, because it expresses the importance of time and grief. The family needed time a part to heal and regenerate, to understand and breathe. Time is a protagonist as the other characters. *To the Lighthouse* investigates time at all scales, following the complex ideas and feelings experienced in a single second, while also reflecting on the infinite geological time that stretches back into the past and forward into the future. The novel occurs virtually in real time, since the time it takes to read each section is almost similar to the activity detailed in those parts. Each character's perspective picks up a vast array of detail in these portions. The novel also focuses on the Ramsey's vacation time and that of their visitors, for whom this time represents a break from their regular lives in London, with its work and precise time. It also examines the circular, ritualistic time of communal activity and habit that the characters repeat during their daily routine made by walks and dinners. *To the Lighthouse* zooms out from daily life and considers time has wider frameworks. Mrs. Ramsey

creates living experiences until they became transcendent after her death, and Lily paints to the experience of eternity. The novel eventually exhibits the deficiency of clock time to measure human experience; life is not felt second by second. In fact, one moment appears to delay an unfathomable length of time while the following twenty years speed by. Memories come back in the present and continue to live, in some cases appearing never to have passed. Virginia Woolf wants to make the reader understand how life goes on contemporary to our emotions and feelings, unifying time passing with our process of growing. That is why the theme of time is so important in this novel, because it gives to the Ramsey family and to their suffering a meaning. Healing takes time and *To the Lighthouse* is the perfect example.

3.2 Grief

Grief has been a significant aspect of Virginia Woolf's life. Loss and grief are presented in her novels as a universal and daily element of life, something everyone has to get through once in their lifetime. The precariousness of life was very much present in Virginia's experience; she lost her mother when she was only thirteen years old and, later, her stepsister. After some time also her father died and subsequently her brother and her nephew. These family losses were lived again by the writer in her works as for instance with the death of Mrs. Ramsey in *To the Lighthouse* or the suicide of Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The mourning that Woolf had to face deeply marked her life, affecting her future and her personality. After the death of her mother, the writer experienced an extended period of depression, and it was during that period that the first signs of her mental illness began to appear plaguing her for the rest of her life. Her crises started to alternate with periods of great creativity; writing for Woolf was a way of transforming reality and, at the same time, overcoming pain. The War intensified her depressive crises, which had become increasingly violent. On March 28, 1941, before a new crisis, the writer left her home and took her last walk, she filled her pockets with stones, and she allowed herself to drown in the river.

It is interesting to notice how death and mourning could lead to madness and mental health. Trauma is indeed the emotional response to the terrible events of life, indeed grief and trauma can be interconnected and seen with the same light, even though they are not the same thing. Virginia Woolf embodies this easy correlation, and she reports it in one of her novels: *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf introduces one of her most intriguing characters, Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus suffers from shellshock, which leads him to lose his mind. He feels guilty for what he had lived and happened during the war and starts to remove himself from the physical world. He sees and talks with nature, hearing things that are not real. He talks to his dead friend Evans, mourning

his loss every minute. He is unable to overcome his hallucinations of Evans or to accept the reality that he is dead. His marriage to Rezia right after Evan's death offers him a substitute, but he fails to respond to her.⁴ He cannot, differently from Clarissa, keep a contact with his past and that drives him crazy. Septimus offers a contrast between the struggle of the working class and the life of the upper one, questioning the authenticity of English culture. He indeed chooses to escape his own problem by killing himself, a tragic gesture that, at the end of the novel, will help Clarissa to accept life and her own choices. Death arrives at Clarissa's party as an intruder that seems to be there to ruin the wonderful time everyone seems to have. She is also offended that the argument was brought up but, somehow, she cannot stop thinking about the accident. The death of Septimus forces Clarissa to elaborate her own values more consciously and, even though they did not know each other, the impact of his death is the demonstration of what death can cause; how we make a difference even if we do not believe it. Suicide is a way of communicating and communication makes questioning life, and the responses can only be found if we are able to go through the interiority of the other. Septimus' suicide brings the main protagonist, Clarissa, to the realization of what she is and what she is doing with her life; she can get back what Peter Walsh called "the death of her soul", the death of who she really is and the understanding of how she is adapting her own person to a society that implies certain standards. In fact, *Mrs. Dalloway* does not only discuss the physical death of a person and its impact, but it also brings up the death of our own soul, and how society can lead people to turn off our light to be accepted. Clarissa chooses life, she chooses to live and to be who she is.

To the Lighthouse is one of the most introspective and significant novels of Virginia Woolf and death and mourning are surely one of the most present themes, even if it is not discussed directly. The death of the main characters is in fact presented in parenthesis in the second part of the work, "Time Passes." Mrs. Ramsey's death is abjectly the central event, but it is still announced in an unusual way. Avoiding speaking directly to death could be associated to Virginia's life experiences and how death surrounded her entire existence, not only with the loss of her loved one but also with the several attempts of suicide and the future war that consumed all Europe. Death was a shadow following Virginia every day of her life and that is what happens in her novel, death is a shadow present in every character and in the house itself, demonstrating again its impact and consequences. "Time Passes" is the silent announcement of death, the darkness described in this section is the symbol of loss and silence. The empty and abandoned house seems to be dead too, without anyone living inside and taking care of the décor or the kitchen. Only nature is living inside the house, watching, and searching for what was left behind, as a reminder that the one that goes

⁴ S. B. Smith, Reinventing Grief work, Twentieth Century Literature, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), p. 316.

away physically are instead always by our side, taking care and looking for us. The deserted house represents the mourning, the detachment from the outside and the emptiness that we feel inside that is going to be filled only when ready and healed. The empty house is a way of the author to describe what is happening to the characters while they are far away from a house that makes them feel and remember something that is not present anymore. The Ramsey family does not go back to the house for ten years and the house is left to the forces of nature and time, that cover it with darkness except when the lighthouse lights up briefly the old walls entering through the windows. The only alive person taking care of the house is Mrs. McNab, a working-class member, that could be associated with the representation of an ideal work of grief that tries to save the past in the best interest of the present; Mrs. McNab's slow work of taking care of the house helps and allows the rest of the family to elaborate their own work and loss. Another interesting aspect regarding death in *To the Lighthouse* is that it leads to a thematic purpose in the writing process. Death is indeed the main element that brings major changing in the characters and that makes the reader think and evaluate life and the story itself. For instance, the visit to the lighthouse happens only after Mrs. Ramsey's death, and during this short trip the two sons understand better their father improving their relationship. The trip to the lighthouse could have happened way before the death of their mother and that can also make the reader understand the importance of the present and the idea of not taking anything for granted. The father himself, Mr. Ramsey, is presented in the last section of the novel as a completely different man; sensitive and gentle, a man searching for affection and comprehension. A man that needed his wife when she was alive even though he could not allow himself to show affection and love and that, as everybody else, misses his lost children and the life they had before. Mrs. Ramsay was an incredible woman that left a hole not only in her family heart but also in the one surrounding her, such as Lily Briscoe. Much of the final part is dedicated to Lily and to her difficulties to accept the loss of such an important figure. Lily decides to conclude her painting started ten years before, and throughout her work she can overcome her suffering and grieving. She admired and loved Mrs. Ramsey even if sometimes she felt controlled and against her traditional visions of life. The portrait and its process are the perfect representation of Lily healing from her sufferings, she is indeed unable to put up the blurred canvas and the shapes she wants to represent until she gradually starts to imagine and figuring out what she wants. She understands how to deal with the reality of death through art completing the stage of mourning by putting her final brush. In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf rejects the gendered role-playing of conventional sympathy as well as the psychoanalytic concept of grief that contemplates a detachment from the dead. She instead supports meaningful works expressing grief without

conventions, without any doctors or therapists.⁵

Death is in both novel a way of communicating, it is suffering and questioning but also growth and consciousness. *Mrs. Dalloway* represents death as a way of escaping life and suffering, physically and mentally. *To the Lighthouse* represents death as something that, even if it takes someone away, it teaches us more than what we could expect. The only way of overcoming loss and grief is to see through ourselves and the others to discover that what was left behind will help us to love life and those who surround us even more.

3.3 Family

Everyone has a family, maybe its composition is different, and it has different million shades, but everybody has something in their life that they can call family. Family is the first thing in life able to influence us and to determine parts of our personality. That is why it has such an important and significant role in our daily lives and in our own world, and that is the reason why it could be possible to say that family, and the relationships that develop inside this core, need to be discussed and presented in as many ways as possible. Virginia Woolf knew the importance of family relations and their impact on life and her mind. As already discussed in this research, Woolf had to get through a difficult childhood and adolescence due not only to her parents' death but also to the unusual family situation. When she came into the world her parents already had several older children from previous marriages. Her father was an acclaimed publisher, critic and biographer and was an intimidating figure for her. Her mother was not used to give her any attention and her untimely death changed Virginia's life forever. Upon her father's death, she moved in with her brothers and sisters; at that time, she began to suffer from complex psychotic breaks, which she overcame only momentarily. The author was also sexually abused behind the wall of her house by her half-brother George, which partly influenced her behaviors and her mental illness, opening a scar that will never fully recover. Family relationships were indeed difficult and complicated, but she was able to search and create a new environment for herself that she could call family and feel protected and loved. In Bloomsbury Virginia meets a fellow writer named Leonard Woolf; the two, bounded by real love, get married in 1912. On the surface, Virginia and Leonard's marriage was healthy and full of love. However, Virginia's instability stained the overall success of the marriage. Leonard's life was made difficult because of the fear of his wife's mental breakdowns. Virginia tried to make sense of her unstable situation also through her works and her writing creating characters that could represent her emotions and situations, realizing that, while writing, she was sane and stable. To establish a well-balanced life for Virginia, Leonard continued to love his wife despite their

⁵ S.S. Bennet, Reinventing Grief Work, Twentieth Century Literature, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), p. 323.

struggle. Virginia has indeed the fortune to meet and love a man that took care of her as she served, creating the family environment that she always wanted and searched as a child. They did not have children due also to Virginia's health but that did not stop them to have a strong and significant marriage that lasted until Virginia's death. Virginia Woolf's vision of family relations in her works is still modern and relates to many normal families. By reading her words the readers can find themselves in many situations and events described by the author. In *Mrs. Dalloway* family is the only thing that tries to keep Septimus alive, and it is also one of the main reasons why Clarissa loves and chooses her life. In *To the Lighthouse* the relationships between children and parents are full of patterns that many of us live and face during adolescence and childhood. The misunderstandings of simple human beings that try to do their best. The relationship between two adults that at some point became parents and detached from each other give to the reader the possibility to see Mrs. Ramsey and her husband from a different perspective. Virginia can give to both parents and children their version and vision of a story that, somehow, relates to every one of us.

Family in *Mrs. Dalloway*, even if is not one of the main and visible themes, is an important aspect of the story. The Dalloway family is composed by Clarissa Dalloway and her husband Richard Dalloway, together they have a daughter called Elizabeth. On the other hand, we find Septimus Warren Smith that is married to Lucrezia Smith (Rezia). The description of the relationship between Mrs. Dalloway and Mr. Dalloway can be associated with a lack of passion but with a stable and safe marriage that leads to the acceptance of life's ups and downs. Clarissa loves her husband and even if she sometimes dreams of a different life, she is at the end happy with her choices and her family. Her relationship with her daughter is quite interesting. Woolf makes us understand how Clarissa is a distant mother, a mother that is busier thinking about her party than her daughter. A daughter that is described as passive and easily influenced, very different from her mother that loves parties and pretty clothing: "With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa lent over the banister and cried out, 'Remember the party! Remember our party tonight!'". Clarissa's absence in her daughter's life is filled by another character, Mrs. Kilman. Mrs. Kilman is an ugly, poor woman working for the Dalloway family and she gets really close to Elizabeth. The two create a connection that somehow can recall the love interest that Clarissa had for her friend Sally Seaton. Mrs. Kilman wants to be closer to Elizabeth and to teach her what living a full life really means. She feels a strong hatred for Clarissa criticizing her role as a mother and as a person. The Dalloway family is at the end a normal family that goes through struggle and difficulties. They indeed had to face Clarissa's illness and the war that traumatized every person in various ways. It is also important to remember that Virginia is describing a family in 1925, when spouses had to be together despite everything and homosexuality was not accepted. The author presents every aspect of

reality through her characters critiquing the absence of a mother but also the incapacity of demonstrating love and affection. On the other end the story also presents the Smiths family that is formed by only Septimus and his wife. Under the surface of their relationship the author narrates the story of a husband traumatized by a war and a wife who cannot understand such a trauma. It is the story of a shattered family. The most interesting aspect of this couple is probably the love that Reiza has for her husband. Despite his illness and his craziness, she stands by his side hoping to find again her husband behind the eyes of this mad man. Reiza is the node that keep the marriage tight and strong. She loses her husband way before his suicide; she indeed sees the man she loves changing and becoming a stranger. A man full of life that at some point started to feel nothing and to see only the darkness of the world. Reiza shows us an act of real love and loyalty; a woman that decides to help and love a man that is not himself anymore, a man that is not able to give her what she has signed for. Nevertheless, she stays, hoping to talk and see again who was, at some point, the man she loves. Family in *Mrs. Dalloway* is indeed choices, it is the ability of choosing every day the people we have around even when we do not understand them and even when we do not find ourselves anymore in each other's eyes. It is differences and admiration, mistakes, and silences. Family in *Mrs. Dalloway* is love as a choice despite everything.

To the Lighthouse is probably one of the most personal and familiar work Virginia ever wrote. It is possible to refer to it as an autobiographical novel that was initially born as a way of escaping reality and resolving some inner conflicts that Woolf had related to her parents and childhood. Reading *To the Lighthouse* knowing Woolf's background history can really help the reader to understand the struggles among the family members and how Virginia created and thought about every character. Many are the similarities between the Ramseys and the Stephens, who loved to spend summer vacations in St. Ives in Cornwall; only the untimely death of the writer's mother put an end to those happy summers in southwest England. Virginia was inspired by her own parents to tell the story of Mrs. and Mr. Ramsey. Her diary, written in 1925, reveals this without hesitation; the novel had to be short and to highlight the personality of her own parents. The novel does not have a direct meaning or aim, the readers, based on their own experiences, must find, and interpret their own version of the relationships described by Woolf. The Ramseys are a numerous family, with their eight children, Mr. Ramsey and his wife are the center of the narrative lightening in particular the figure of Mrs. Ramsey. Mr. Ramsey is a philosophy professor that had difficulties to express his feelings, and this leads often to many misunderstandings with his children that dislike him. In fact, he is quite insecure and thinks a lot about his professional fear acting then selfishly and harshly. Even though he knows how fortunate he is to have such a lovely family, he verbally punishes his wife and kids by expecting them to be always caring, supportive and gentle. On the

other hand, his wife is a lovely and caring woman that takes care of everything and everyone in the house to create an unforgettable environment and experience for the numerous visitors. She is a devoted and kind wife even if she struggles with her husband's mood swings and selfishness. Despite everything, she can overcome every difficult situation having the ability to create meaningful and long-lasting memories. She affirms traditional gender roles by being a protective and loving mother who not only takes care of the children but also of the house and the guests. Unlike her husband, Mrs. Ramsey tries always to reassure her children even when the reality is not nice, for instance when James wants to visit the lighthouse and his father denies his wish due to the dangerous weather, she lies to him assuring James that the trip will be possible even if it is not true. She wants to preserve and protect the simple and joyful things in life by being kind and good. Somehow this kindness and reassurance particularly come out in presence of her husband and the other male visitors, this is probably because Mrs. Ramsey feels somehow obliged to protect the opposite sex because of their vulnerability and the need of constant reassurance. Her figure, as a mother and a woman, brings unity and love leaving her mark into everyone she meets. It would be possible to say that the two parents pose completely in opposite ways toward their children, building different relationships. Mr. Ramsey is perpetually aloof and stern, pretentious and direct causing anxiety, and hatred in his own children. His wife, on the other hand, by being kind and loving, conveys stability and affection to the children. These differences will create a division between the two figures leading the children to identify the mother as the good one and their father as the bad guy of the story. This division tells the reader a lot about the relationship between the couple. The relationship between two parents should indeed convey union and cooperation, something that in the Ramseys is only transmit by the mother. The relationship between the two is in fact detached and cold, almost one-side. It does not transmit cooperation but instead it always seems as Mr. Ramsey is the one seeking support and reassurance from his wife who gives her husband what he needs without asking for anything in return. However, there are certain times in the novel where the two protagonists have unspoken interactions. These interactions are possible thanks to Woolf's writing, the author is indeed able to express their emotions that are invisible to the eyes of the one surrounding them. They reveal their true feelings for each other and their sense of protection towards their love and marriage. Even if the health of their relationship appears questionable, the two appear to be, at the end, normal human beings that are living and experiencing life for the first time as everybody else, trying to act in the best conceivable way they can. Despite their differences they hold their marriage together even after eight children, Mrs. Ramsey herself thinks that herself and her husband possess something that keeps them from falling apart. They do not communicate verbally but they understand each other, and even if their love can be

questionable, they choose to stay together and support each other. Mr. Ramsey is indeed the character who suffers the most from his wife's death, changing completely his way of living and understanding life. His way of acting at the end of the novel reveals a more sensitive way of connecting with his children; he is trying to fix his past mistakes and to make his family understand his love, he does not communicate with words, but he acts and changes. That makes us understand how Mrs. Ramsey was the one unifying and anchoring the family, causing with her death the necessity of new communication and commitment by the other member. Woolf's work describes what could be called a normal parent-child detachment that often arises into every normal family. As we grow up, in fact, parents start to become an obstacle more than a figure of help. Woolf is able to perfectly describe how the parental figure is perceived by their children, the expectation of a perfect parent who always knows how to act and behave. The author's ability to move from the children to the adult's minds allows the reader to see and understand two sides of the same coin, conveying the idea that, before being a parent, they are human beings with emotions, traumas, and doubts. That is something understandable mostly at the end of the novel, when James finally connects with his father during the trip to the lighthouse, finding himself in a figure that he has always despised. James understanding his father and their relationship is perfectly connected to what Woolf means when talking about moments of being, the comprehension and the ability of unifying those scattered dots that brought confusion and suffering into the lives of the characters. The relationships previously discussed are not the only type of family relations we encounter. In fact, Virginia inserts in her narration the figure of Lily Briscoe, a young woman attached to the Ramsey family as if it was her own. Mrs. Ramsey is like a mother to Lily, a figure of reference and support. She indeed decides to depict her in one of her paintings, a painting that will become integral to the novel and its development is the representation of Lily's relationship with the Ramsey family, particularly with Mrs. Ramsey. The relationship between the two women is complicated, it is a mixture of admiration and incomprehension. Lily loves and admires Mrs. Ramsey for her capacity of unifying people and transmitting affection and safety. She knows that this incredible woman loves her and wants the best for Lily, even though Lily has a distinct perspective of what life should be. Mrs. Ramsey presses Lily to get married and have a family, while Lily does not feel the need to, she feels this pressure and insecurity that makes her feel not enough and wrong. Virginia Woolf here describes the difficulties behind not feeling worthy and the fear of disappointing those we rely on. On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsey criticizes Lily for her look, and she does not always take her seriously; from another perspective it can be said that a part of Mrs. Ramsey is jealous of Lily's freedom, she does not play any roles, men do not rely on her, and she can spend her time painting something no one takes seriously. Lily is the only figure who tries to

escape the traditional reality, chasing her dreams and changing the cards on the table. Mrs. Ramsey hated how Lily was free-thinking and revolutionary, while Lily hated the feeling of following and conforming to society's expectation. Lily feels alone but even after Mrs. Ramsey's death she will be haunted by her ghost and her difficult relationship with the Ramseys. Despite everything, their love\hate relationship helped Lily understand her life and accept her decisions. The two women created harmony where they could see and understand life through each other's eyes. By the end of the novel Lily realizes the importance of Mrs. Ramsey in her life, she cries, and she is able to bring her to life through her painting.

Family relationships in the novel are incredibly profound and significant, Virginia Woolf can describe what a normal family could look like without removing any value from it. She gives significance to what is common, recreating dynamics suitable for every situation. The death of the main figure inside the family brings down all the frivolous issues affecting the daily life of the members. Death, in this case, allowed for togetherness. When the one who used to create harmony and union left, the rest of the family had to learn how to unite and love without the support of a mother, a wife, and a friend.

Family was for Virginia Woolf an essential theme that influenced her whole life, she was inspired by her past and experiences to share what normal life is with its worth and depth without being afraid of narrating a reality that suits everybody. Virginia Woolf is, for this reason, one of the greatest writers of all time. Her writing is timeless, full of emotions and significance; she was able to create something that relates to everyone, that makes you understand and being aware of what surrounds you. Her mind, despite her health, was three steps forward everybody else; she changed literature and the way of seeing life, mind, and our hearts. Virginia Woolf, as Lily Briscoe, was able to create an art that will remain forever.

CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf was an incredible writer and her words marked literature's history and the life of millions of readers that have found themselves through her works. Her story and the events she experienced throughout her entire life helped us understand her pain and her ability of creating narratives that can relate to every human being. Her narration of moments of being give us the capacity of understanding how precious life can be. Those moments when an individual is fully conscious of his or her experiences, a moment when human being catches a glimpse of connection to a larger pattern hidden behind the surface of daily life, opening a hidden reality. Studying Virginia Woolf helps opening our mind and forces us to understand different realities. We grow up in a world full of blindness and egoism, a reality that makes us believe that our eyes are the only one looking around and living this world. Virginia Woolf teaches us that sometimes life can be quite different from what we can imagine; reality is neither white or black but a variety of colors and shades that sometimes seems impossible to define and describe. Reality is made by millions of eyes that live differently same situations and events. Woolf's works represent an immortal way of interpreting life in the most humble and real vision, narrating stories that seems common but that hide a deep and thoughtful meaning. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are two incredible and innovative novels that represent Woolf in her most intense and profound version, narrating a part of herself that will remain forever. She was able to teach us how to appreciate life and how to relate to her moments of being, remembering to not live passively but to feel every emotion while living it, without the fear of choosing the wrong.

RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO

Virginia Woolf nasce il 25 gennaio 1882 ed è stata una scrittrice, saggista e attivista britannica, muore suicida nel 1941. È ritenuta una delle figure principali della letteratura del XX secolo stravolgendo quella che all'epoca era una scrittura tradizionale in un ambiente di cambiamento e confusione. Il XX secolo stava infatti attraversando un periodo di grande instabilità dovuto soprattutto allo scoppio delle due guerre mondiali, le quali conseguenze hanno influito tragicamente non solo a livello fisico ma psicologico. L'Europa, instabile e disorientata, cercava riparo, cambiamento e nuove risposte. Artisti e letterari dell'epoca trasmettono nelle loro opere questa sensazione di ricerca e innovazione necessaria ad un progresso e ad una crescita non solo come società ma nel singolo stesso. Virginia Woolf fu una delle scrittrici più rivoluzionarie del periodo. Woolf utilizza nelle sue opere il flusso di coscienza, visto e presentato già in precedenza in differenti forme da Joyce, riprendendo una narrazione basata sui pensieri dei personaggi che viaggiano tra passato, presente e futuro raccontando la vita di tutti i giorni insieme ai suoi significati più profondi e nascosti. Virginia Woolf riprende la tematica del tempo rivoluzionando la narrazione lineare tradizionale; Woolf riteneva infatti importante ricordare quanto, nella vita, un evento, un'emozione o una situazione di pochi minuti potesse influenzarci e colpirci molto più fortemente rispetto ad anni di esperienze e di vita. Di quanto le piccole esperienze infieriscano e formino in maniera inconscia la nostra personalità e il nostro approccio alla vita e alle scelte che prendiamo. Virginia Woolf infatti tratta e presenta l'idea dei 'moments of being', o momenti dell'essere: rari momenti nei quali i vari personaggi riescono a guardarsi interiormente vedendo una realtà che va oltre le apparenze. La rappresentazione della vita diviene complessa a causa della simultaneità tra presente e passato e dalle diverse prospettive delle persone che ci circondano e che percepiscono la realtà diversamente. Attraverso i momenti dell'essere, l'uomo ha una visione interna e soggettiva che gli permette di dare forma al caos circostante, visionando improvvisamente ciò che conta e vivendo le emozioni a pieno. Una visione che ci mostra il significato della vita e che, quando termina, lascia di nuovo posto ad un caos composto da incertezza. Virginia Woolf riporta nelle sue opere sé stessa e il suo passato complesso e difficile raccontando di sé attraverso i suoi personaggi. Due tra le sue opere più conosciute e significative ricordiamo *La signora Dalloway* (Mrs. Dalloway) e *Gita al faro* (To the Lighthouse).

Mrs. Dalloway, pubblicata nel 1925, è uno dei testi più rivoluzionari della letteratura inglese a livello stilistico e di narrazione. Woolf, infatti, racchiude la narrazione in solo giorno raccontando, attraverso i pensieri e le menti dei vari personaggi, la giornata di Clarissa Dalloway, la quale sta

organizzando una festa nella Londra post Prima guerra mondiale. Virginia contrappone la vita della signora Dalloway con quella del veterano Septimus, il quale soffre di shell shock post traumatico, il quale morirà suicida alla fine del romanzo. Mrs. Dalloway è il racconto di una giornata normale viaggiando attraverso il tempo dei ricordi permettendo all'autrice di unire il passato con il presente riprendendo tematiche quali la morte, la famiglia e, ovviamente, il tempo.

Le tematiche nominate si riscontrano anche in *Gita al faro*, romanzo del 1927 che racconta la vita della famiglia Ramsey durante il loro soggiorno estivo. L'opera racconta l'ambiente familiare sotto differenti punti di vista, riportando sfumature innovative riguardanti relazioni comuni e apparentemente normali. L'opera si suddivide in tre parti presentando in ognuna delle tre sezioni una tipologia di narrazione e significati differenti. La morte della madre è l'evento più significativo dell'opera la quale permetterà all'autrice di sviluppare e narrare dinamiche familiari vicine, non solo a Virginia stessa, ma anche a qualsiasi lettore. La famiglia, la morte e l'impatto del tempo accompagneranno tutta l'opera raccontando lo sviluppo di ogni personaggio insieme alle proprie realizzazioni.

Virginia Woolf è stata quindi in grado di creare uno spazio di narrazione e racconto che potesse trasmettere l'autenticità dell'essere umano nella sua semplicità e umanità, senza paura di trasmettere il negativo e il positivo della vita, ricordando al lettore di quanto sia importante vivere pienamente e consapevolmente. Le opere di Virginia sono una finestra su un mondo che pensiamo di conoscere ma che, in realtà, viviamo con i paraocchi, necessitando di andare oltre una superficie che offusca. Virginia Woolf e i suoi romanzi sono una luce nuova, capace di illuminare una realtà che impariamo a conoscere ogni giorno, semplicemente vivendo.

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