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**The Novel as Autobiography and Therapy:  
Virginia Woolf's  
*Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse***

A dissertation submitted to the Department of English in partial fulfillment for  
the Degree of Master in British and American studies

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*To women and misogyny, to every passion  
and to all my beloved folk*

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A student cannot be without a teacher. In his *The Prophet*, Khalil Gibran writes about teaching:

*No man can reveal to your aught but that which lies half asleep in the dawning of your own knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom, but rather his faith and lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.*

With these beautiful words, a laudatory message is vouched to all my teachers without exception for their wisdom, generosity, humility and total devotion.

## **Abstract**

This paper examines Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in order to show how her personal experiences influenced her writings. In *Mrs Dalloway* as in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf writes her joys and, above all, her pains. In fact, Virginia Woolf had always been confronted to the vicissitudes of life; a happy family life, a series of cherished people's deaths, sexual abuses of brothers, the passion of a beloved husband, ravages of a war, a brilliant intellectual life, and the concerns of a woman as a woman and as an individual in the society, all punctuated with serious mental breakdowns and numerous suicide attempts. The consequences of Woolf's sinuous biography are reflected and described in these two novels by means of plots, a set of characters, symbols and themes. Writing, ultimately, comes as therapy for self-expression, claim and communication.

## Résumé

Le présent travail examine deux romans importants de Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* et *To the Lighthouse*, afin de montrer dans quelle mesure ses expériences personnelles ont influencé ses écrits. Dans ces deux ouvrages, Woolf évoque ses joies et surtout, ses peines. En réalité, Virginia Woolf a toujours été confrontée aux vicissitudes de la vie : d'abord une vie de famille heureuse, ensuite, la mort de plusieurs personnes qu'elle chérissait, les abus sexuels de ses frères, la passion d'un tendre époux, les ravages de la guerre, une vie intellectuelle brillante, les appréhensions d'une femme au tant que femme et au tant que membre d'une société, le tout ponctué par des dépressions nerveuses plus ou moins sérieuses et de nombreuses tentatives de suicides. Les conséquences de la biographie sinueuse de Woolf se reflètent dans ces deux romans à travers la trame, les personnages, les symboles utilisés, ainsi que les thèmes choisis. Pour clore, l'écriture devient une thérapie qui en plus permet à l'auteur de s'exprimer, de revendiquer et de communiquer.

## ملخص

هذا العمل يدرس أهم مؤلفتين لفرجينيا وولف *Mrs Dalloway* و *To the Lighthouse* ليبين

مدى انعكاس تجاربها الشخصية في كتابتها . عبرت فيهما وولف عن سعادتها و خصوصا آلامها و أحزانها. في الواقع فرجينيا وولف واجهت الكثير من تقلبات و تغيرات الحياة : أولها كانت حياة عائلية سعيدة, فسلسلة من وفيات لأشخاص عزيزين عليها ، ثم تعرضها لتحرش جنسي من إخوانها ، عشق من زوج محبوب ، شراسة الحرب ، حياة فكرية متألقة ، مشاغلها كامرأة من جهة و مشاغلها كفرد من المجتمع من جهة أخرى ، و كلها تتخللها انهيارات عصبية متفاوتة الخطورة و عديد من محاولات الانتحار . سيرتها الذاتية تظهر في الروايتين من خلال الحكمة ، الشخصيات، الرموز و المواضيع. في الختام, قد تكون الكتابة علاج ذاتي، حيث تمكن المؤلف أن يعبر، يحتج و يتواصل.

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## Abbreviations

AROO: *A Room Of One's Own*

MD: *Mr Dalloway*

TDM: *The Death of the Moth.*

TTL: *To The Lighthouse.*

## General Introduction

'This here is a riddle,' George said.

'I listening.'

'Two Indians was walking on a trail. The one in front was the son of the one behind, but the one behind was not his father. What kin was they?'

'Less see. His stepfather.'

George grimed at Portia with his little square, blue teeth.

'His uncle, then.'

'You can't guess. It was his mother...'

Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1943) p237

The 'trick', as McCullers says, people don't think about an Indian being a woman or simply about a 'boy' being the 'son' of a lady. This kind of stereotype which aims at marginalizing women exists everywhere. It is the continuing paradox of women's writing that while female writers continually had to deny, disguise, justify or apologize for their existence, they have quietly got on with the job of mastering the novel form. From Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684), to Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983), women have undoubtedly captured the heights, they have also explored all the things they

thought appropriate in the novel, a territory that was exclusively reserved for “Men Only: No Trespassers Allowed”( Miles 194).

Raymond Williams claims that it is often asserted that as women were excluded from the social and political functioning of a predominantly masculine world, so they expressed themselves creatively through the novel. However, this is true to a certain extent because women were not allowed to express themselves as women. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf observes a common judgement: “this is an important book ... because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room”. ( Woolf AROO 74)

In 1837, the poet Robert Southey said that the more the woman is engaged in her proper duties the less leisure will she have for literature and writing. The feminist critics Dale Spender, Jane Spencer and Rosalind Miles oppose this opinion. Dale Spender in her book *Mothers of the Novel*, and Jane Spencer's *The Rise of the Women Novelist* demonstrate that women writers' contribution to the development of the genre in terms of techniques and subject matter was often far more extensive and crucial than standard literary histories. Rosalind Miles claims that women's social and political exclusion shaped their great literary creativity.

Writing, thus, functions as a means of self-expression, communication, claim for rights and equality and as a therapy to get rid of daily pressures. Jane, The main character in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's controversial short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper”, writes to express her anxieties and her mental and sentimental troubles,

that her surrounding especially her husband, John, do ignore and fail to understand. Apart from a sheet of paper and a pen, Women have no space for them (for blossoming). A woman “must have a room of her own”(06), as Virginia Woolf insists again in *A Room of One's Own*.

A wave of “lady novelists”<sup>1</sup>, to echo the feminist critic George Henry Lewis, remarkably rose together with denominations and etiquettes starting from “feminine” writings in the nineteenth century, to “feminism” as a movement in the twentieth century. One wonders whether the fact that women started writing novels in such vast numbers implies there was a genuine feminist and feminine tradition in novel writing and why women’s literature cannot be considered simply as literature.

Virginia Woolf was among the novelists who lived and witnessed the crucial transition, both in history and literature, from the Victorian era to the modernity of the twentieth century. New concepts, ideologies, policies, technologies, wars and theories were brought into life. People felt the need to create movements and to attribute to them specific names to reorganize the world after the upheaval of the First World War (1914-1918). Women started to impose their fingerprints in various domains. In England, for example, by participating in the war, the Suffragette Movement used patriotism to obtain the right of vote. Virginia Woolf is the best remembered woman writer of the period because of her great contribution to literature. She is often considered as a feminist writer and critic. In this respect, the

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<sup>1</sup> This is borrowed from George Henry Lewes’ title of his book *The Lady Novelists* (1852)

main concern of this paper is whether Virginia Woolf is actually feminist, feminine, realist, or simply a literary artist and novelist.

By applying the feminist approach to Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the questions raised previously should be resolved. The thesis underlying this paper assumes that Virginia Woolf is not a feminist but a talented writer motivated and influenced by all of reality, personal experiences and the environment. The fact that Woolf is woman writing about women cannot be put aside. In addition the central characters are women who play an important role in the daily political life of the period. Since the paper gives a specific look at the central characters of the two novels to draw a link between them and Virginia Woolf 's life, the feminist approach seems to be most suitable.

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925) presents a day in the life of a middle-aged married woman who is a political hostess giving an evening party. Close attention is given to Mrs Dalloway's responsibilities as a hostess, buying flowers, arranging for food and drinks, conferring with servants, planning her own clothing, and bringing her guests together during the party. In other words, women are made for limited tasks as domesticity. But, In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf underlines the ways in which tasks performed by women make it possible for male characters to lead fulfilled lives in comfortable circumstances. The political decision-making process, a male activity, is shown as depending partly upon well-run parties like those given by Mrs Dalloway.

Thus, in order to show whether Virginia Woolf is feminist or simply feminine, and to highlight her sensibility, sensitivity and the influence of her own experience in *Mrs Dalloway* and in *To the Lighthouse*, the present work will be divided into three main chapters. *Reality* and *fiction* will be opposed to show to what extent they can be compatible.

The first chapter aims at giving the reader an overview on the context of *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. First, feminine and feminism will be defined to make a clear distinction between them. Then, the most important events in Woolf's life will be given in a brief biography of the author. Finally, the chapter will end with a historical background of the novels' period.

The second chapter will be dedicated to *Mrs Dalloway*. A summary of major events is necessary to understand the main character, Mrs Dalloway. Then, particular attention will be given to Mrs Dalloway, the party given in her house, and her relationship with Septimus Warren Smith, a mentally disturbed veteran of the First World War and whom she never met directly. Mrs Dalloway represents women's role in politics as perfect hostesses. Most importantly, she symbolizes women's mental (anxiety), physical (sexuality) and special (liberty) state in the society.

The third chapter will consist in a study of *To the Lighthouse*. In this respect, the same method will be followed as in the second chapter for *Mrs Dalloway*; starting with a plot summary and then moving to a study of Mrs Ramsay (the main character) and the themes related to her and to Virginia Woolf. As Mrs. Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay

is a wonderful hostess who takes pride in making memorable experiences for the guests at the family's summer home. The novel shows the evaluation of the Ramsays from the pre War to the post war period.

What motivated this work is a personal interest in Virginia Woolf and a fascination with her work. In addition, Woolf has a style of writing which is very ironic and quiet complex. Of equal importance is my other interest in the development of feminism and the proportion it took as an extremist movement defending what might be considered as utopian ideas in a world eventually made by men for men.

# Chapter One

## Definitions and General Background

### Introduction

Amongst the most frequent questions that one asks when one endeavours to talk about women's literature are: "Why women's literature? Isn't all literature fundamentally the same?" There are no absolute answers to such questions. There are many literary texts that a reader could look at without being able to distinguish whether they are the works of a woman or a man. In all cultures, the experiences of men differ from those of women. And quite naturally these experiences are reflected in the writings of men and women. Dividing literature into categories is certainly useful scholarly. We may find it helpful to read medieval works separately from nineteenth century works, or to consider poetry separately from fiction. Similarly, many people have felt that it is useful to look at works written by men separately from works written by women. However, it is important to underline that women's path in literature was more difficult than men's. As Virginia Woolf held:

My profession is literature, and in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage-fewer, I mean,



that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago-by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn , by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot- many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. Thus, when I came to write, there were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was made on the family purse. For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare- if one has a mind that way. Pianos and models, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, masters and mistresses. And not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in other professions. ( Woolf TDM 61)

After the First World War, major female writers have been given the status of Feminist. Virginia Woolf was not an exception.

## **I- Definitions**

### **A. Feminism in literature**

According to the Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory, feminism criticism is the development and movement in critical theory and the evaluation of literature. This movement was at its high and flourished in the late 1960s. Feminist theory is an attempt to describe, interpret and “reinterpret” (Cuddon 315) women’s experience as described in various literary works, specially the novel.

Generally we can say that feminism has two aspects. First, it identifies inequalities and injustices in the way girls and women are treated in a particular society, and the disabilities and disadvantages which result from these. A primary aim of feminism is to work to eliminate mistreatment and unequal treatment of women, at the same time understanding that the exact situation of women can differ enormously in different cultures and at different stages of history. The means used to bring about changes in the situation of women may include political action; to change laws, for example, or to increase the participation of women in political life. They may also include attempts to influence public opinion by calling attention to the actual situation of women and the need to improve it.

The second aspect of feminism is that it asserts the values of women, the human dignity and worth of each individual woman and also the distinctive contributions that women make to their culture. It is in relation to this aspect of feminism that one may direct attention to previous undervalued accomplishments of women ( in needlework, and folk medicine, for example). Here also one may find an emphasis on the social and cultural necessity of activities such as nurturing, caring for the helpless, and providing others with emotional supports, typically carried by women:

Certainly our societies presuppose that the mother should nurture the child without payment, before and after the birth, and that she should continue to nurture both man and society- a

totem before any designed, identified or represented totem. To become aware of this is essential if a woman, women are to find a way of situating themselves without remaining in position of obscure nurturers. (Irigaray 13)

Likewise, feminism points to the forgotten or submerged contributions of women to fields apparently dominated by men. Literature is among these fields.

## **B. Feminine novels**

The word “feminine” was attributed to women’s writing to bold once more the barrier between “male/female”. The nineteenth century women writers attempted to establish women writings in their own terms with a woman’s touch of emotion.

If we consider, for example, a novel by Jane Austen, the author is a women writing mainly about women. In the past, works which focused on women were often thought of as aimed mainly at women readers, while works which focused on men were considered to be aimed at a general audience. It has not usually been considered particularly significant that a major novel like Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851) has no women characters. Some subjects, waging war, life at sea and struggles for political power seem to exclude or minimize women characters because for the most part women have not, historically, been central or public participants in these activities.

We notice that women writers frequently have given us a more detailed depiction of women's lives, ideas, emotions and preoccupations, than men have. Women writers often treat problems of love, sexuality and marriage. As Jane Austen qualifies as "a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"(Austen 225). But women writers frequently include other aspects of women's life as well like feelings and their relationships with men and the external world. For example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) gives us detailed treatments of Jane's relationship with two men; Mr Rochester and St John Rivers. Although both of these are certainly central to the novel, Charlotte Brontë also gives detailed accounts of Jane's relationships with a number of female characters; Mrs Reed, Eliza and Georgiana, Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax, Diana and Marry Rivers. Considerable attention is given to Jane's reading, to her education and her interest in art. And there is some account of her activities as a teacher.<sup>2</sup>

Women are uniquely placed to write about their own sexuality. While an occasional writer in earlier centuries, such as the seventeenth century poet and dramatist Aphra Behn, wrote fairly directly about women's sexual desires, for the most part this topic has been regarded as taboo. Women writers like George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson and Jane Austen wrote about passion and "platonic" love but, their physical component was left or treated

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<sup>2</sup> This is a short summary of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

indirectly. The topic was also taboo for men writing for mixed audiences in the nineteenth century. However, men such as D.H Lawrence and James Joyce produced highly acclaimed works of sexual frankness. Thus, women and men writers were not given the same liberty in writing.

Yet, gradually, women writers excelled in many literary *genres* such as the gothic novel. Moreover, they treat social and political issues. In the United States the major socio-political issue of the nineteenth century was not industrialization but slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) roused sympathy for slaves and is widely credited with having played a major part in bringing the abolition of slavery.

Much literature written by women in whatever period reflects the contemporary social and political situation. Even in our own time, with all the progress that has been made, women are still not treated equally in many respects, and many values traditionally thought of as "feminine" are only exercised in the private spheres and are not reflected in public.

## **II- Virginia Woolf's biography**

Virginia Woolf came to life in the Victorian era. She was born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London in 1882. Her mother Julia Prinsep Stephen (born Jackson 1846–1895), was born in India to Dr. John and Maria Pattle Jackson and later moved to England with her mother, where she served as a model for painters. Her father, Sir

Leslie Stephen was a remarkable and notable Victorian intellectual. He wrote books in various disciplines; books on history, biography and philosophy. But his sixty-three volume *Dictionary of National Biography* which he edited, was the most famous of his accomplishments. Her parents had each been married previously and been widowed, and, consequently, the household contained the children of three marriages Leslie and Julia had four children together: Vanessa Stephen (1879), Thoby Stephen (1880), Virginia (1882), and Adrian Stephen (1883). Julia had three children from her first husband, Herbert Duckworth: George Duckworth, Stella Duckworth, and Gerald Duckworth. Woolf's father was married to Minny Thackeray, and they had one daughter: Laura Makepeace Stephen, who was declared mentally disabled and lived with the family until she was institutionalized in 1891 (DiBattista 56).

The large Stephen family lived in a house near Hyde Park in London. They were an upper-middle class family with important social connections both with artists and writers, such as the novelists Thackeray and Henry James, and with the social elite of judges, politicians and aristocracy. According to Woolf's memoirs, her most vivid childhood memories, however, were not in London but of St. Ives in Cornwall, where the family spent every summer until 1895, the date corresponding to her mother's death. The Stephens' summer home, Talland House, looked out over Porthminster Bay, and is still standing today, though somewhat altered. Memories of these family holidays and impressions of the landscape, especially the Godrevy Lighthouse, informed the fiction Woolf wrote in *To the Lighthouse*.

As normal at that period, Virginia Stephens did not receive a formal education as it was the case for girls in the Victorian era. She and her sister Vanessa, with whom she was close all her life, had to make with an “at home” education while their brothers were sent to expensive schools. They were widely encouraged by their father to explore his extensive library. Vanessa became a well-known painter. She was among a group who introduced modern painting into England, a modernist in painting as was her sister Virginia in writing.

A series of deaths in her family deeply marked Virginia Stephen’s life. In 1895, Virginia lost her mother when she was only thirteen. Her death had destroyed for ever the family life which Virginia enjoyed cheerfully until then. Her half sister, Stella Duckworth, took her mother’s place in running the household, but just two years later, after two months of marriage, she died suddenly. The sudden death of her mother and that of her half-sister Stella two years later, led to the first of Virginia’s several nervous breakdowns. She was, however, able to take courses of study (some at degree level) in Greek, Latin, German and history at the Ladies’ Department of King’s College London between 1897 and 1901, and this brought her into contact with some of the early reformers of women’s higher education such as Clara Pater, George Warr and Lilian Faithfull (Principal of the King’s Ladies’ Department). Her sister Vanessa also studied Latin, Italian, art and architecture at King’s Ladies’ Department. Nursed by Virginia, Leslie Stephen passed away in 1904 after a painful struggle against an illness. Her brother Thoby whom she admired suddenly died of

typhoid fever. The death of her father in 1904 provoked her most alarming collapse and she was briefly institutionalized.

These deaths badly shook Virginia Stephen and deeply distressed her. She suffered her first serious breakdown in 1895 and her second after her father's death when she tried suicide by throwing herself out a window. At that time, she was seriously affected for many months. Hallucination, suicide attempts surrounded her depressive world. She tried to throw herself from a window. In 1910 and again in 1912 she was obliged to spend some time in a private rest home. A year later, she was again severely ill for an important number of months. After 1916, her breakdowns became less severe.

The twentieth century Virginia Woolf's life was more intellectual than aristocratic. In fact, after the death of her father, she and her sisters bought a house at 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury, a district containing the University of London and the British Museum. In 1912 Virginia Stephen married Leonard Woolf, a friend of one of her brothers at Cambridge. Their home became a meeting place for their brothers' friends from the University of Cambridge. There was formed what became known as the 'Bloomsbury Group'<sup>3</sup>. This group of friends represented much of what was modern both in their rejection of the oppressive taboos of Victorian moral and

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<sup>3</sup> The Bloomsbury Group or Bloomsbury Set was a group of writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists who held informal discussions in Bloomsbury throughout the 20th century. This English collective of friends and relatives lived, worked or studied near Bloomsbury in London during the first half of the twentieth century. Their work deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality. Its best known members were Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, T.S. Eliot and Lytton Strachey.



sexual life and in their cultural and intellectual achievements. Leonard gave up his career as an administrator in the colonial service in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to marry Virginia. He became an independent intellectual, a professional editor, writer and publisher. Together they founded the Hogarth Press which became an influential publishing house and a successful business. Leonard Woolf was an active member in the Labour Party. He provided for his wife affectionate and admiring encouragement and support. Virginia led a very active social life and relations with aristocratic women. Parties, like that given by Clarissa Dalloway were very frequent in her life (Jeffars IX).

Woolf committed suicide. She put on her overcoat, filled its pockets with stones, then walked into the River Ouse near her home and drowned herself. In her last letter to her husband she wrote:

I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier 'til this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that — everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone

from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. V  
(Wikipedia)

Depressed and frightened by the thought that she was again on the verge of madness, she faced both death and her phobia of water.

### **III- Historical, social and political background**

The period that spans Virginia Woolf's life was one of important historical, cultural and social change for Britain. Virginia was born in the Victorian world and came to maturity as an author in the twentieth century world; the Edwardian. In the Victorian world certain concepts such as "empire", "civilization", "progress" and "duty" were words which summed up rooted and unquestioned values. A particular way for understanding history is shown in *Mrs Dalloway*. As a good case in point, in the late Victorian world, it could still seem natural that a great part of the world should be ruled by Britain. The British Empire was assumed to have a civilizing and progressive mission. By the early 1920s, there was a great agitation for the independence of India, the most glorious of imperial possessions. The Labour Party, in which the Woolfs were active, for example, did not see anymore the British Empire destined for ever natural phenomenon. It was already showing signs of collapse.

The assumptions of cultural superiority of the British ruling class, and the rationality and civilization of the European institutions and processes were severely shattered after the First World War. The Great War (1914-18), as it was called, demonstrated the destructive forces and aggression of the European Civilization as well as a serious military and political incompetence (Derek 132). For those like Virginia Woolf and her pacifist friends, the war threw doubt on many of the central beliefs and values of the ruling-class culture especially on patriotism. The war did much to initiate a new age of European culture, the age of scepticism<sup>4</sup>. There were many other indications of the world's change at that period. The Soviet Union and the revolution that swept from it in 1917, swept away a whole order as a challenge of the old ruling classes of the world.

At the level of politics, the Suffragettes (political movement for the vote of women) had stopped their battle with the outbreak of the war in order to contribute more for their country. All Suffragettes prisoners were released on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1914 and their leader ordered the suspension all militant activities opting for "Patriotism first!"(Derek XI). In January 1918 six million women over the age of thirty won the right to vote in Britain. It was not until 1928 that full equality of voting rights between men and women was gained. Virginia Woolf worked for the Suffragette in 1910.

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<sup>4</sup> According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Scepticism" is the doctrine that true knowledge or certainty in a particular area is impossible. More frequently, it describes a lasting mind-set. Scepticism is an approach to accepting, rejecting, or suspending judgment on new information that requires the new information to be well supported by evidence. Individuals who proclaim to have a skeptical outlook are frequently called sceptics, often without regard to whether it is philosophical scepticism or empirical scepticism that they profess. As it was the case of Europe after the First World War.

## Conclusion

Woolf's position in society was contrasting. In one side, she came from a wealthy and privileged family. She enjoyed aristocratic life with servants. In the other side, she and her husband worked very hard and regarded themselves as professional people. The events of her life affected so much her writings. Her diaries show that she was obsessed with the memory of her dead parents for a very long time until her mid-forties when she wrote a portrait of them and their marriage in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. For the rest of her life Virginia was always liable to suffer from *grave* depressions, nervous tensions and physical illness such as anorexia. The madness of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* and his treatment at the hands of the doctors are closely based on her own experience, a mixture of love, illness and sadness that enveloped her life. The sense and sensibility of Virginia Woolf flow in her novels.

## Chapter Two

### Virginia Woolf's experience of madness, social prestige and womanhood in *Mrs Dalloway*

#### Introduction

*Mrs Dalloway* is Virginia Woolf's best known novel. A study of specific aspects in the novel will be developed to draw a parallel between Woolf's life and the novel in order to depict her sense and her sensibility within her work. In other words, the reasons that pushed her to write this novel. However, it is important to start with a plot overview for a better understanding of the analysis. The novel is centered on Mrs. Dalloway in the party given in her house and in the souvenirs of one past event remembered differently by her guests. *Mrs Dalloway* is mainly about Virginia Woolf's experience of mental illness and women's concerns as women and social individuals.

#### I-Mrs. Dalloway: major events

*Mrs Dalloway* presents the events of one woman's life which take place in one single day in June 1923 from morning to night. The novel opens with Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class housewife walking out in the morning through her London neighborhood to buy flowers for the party she is going to host at her house that evening. When she returns from flowers' shopping, she, unexpectedly, meets Peter Walsh, an old suitor and friend dropping at her house. Clarissa and Peter have always

judged each other harshly and their meeting pushes them in a flashback of the past. Years ago, Clarissa refused Peter's proposal for marriage. And Peter had neither accepted it nor recovered from the disappointment. Peter asks Clarissa if she is happy with her new life and especially with her husband, Richard. However, by entering the room, her daughter interrupts the conversation before she could answer. Peter leaves the house to Regent's Park thinking of Clarissa's refusal which still obsesses him.

The narrator, then, moves to Septimus, a veteran of the First World War, who was injured in the warfare and who is now suffering from a Shell shock<sup>5</sup>. Septimus and his Italian wife, Lucrezia, spend time in Regent's Park waiting for Septimus's appointment with Sir William Bradshaw, a famous and distinguished psychiatrist. He was a talented poet and a lover of Shakespeare. He went to war for patriotic reasons. But now, Septimus sees nothing worth of the England he fought for, and he has lost the desire to preserve either his society or himself. Affected by the war, He becomes suicidal and has serious mental problems. However, Sir William does not listen to what Septimus says and diagnoses "a lack of proportion." Sir William plans to separate Septimus from Lucrezia and send him to a mental institution in the country.

Richard Dalloway has lunch with two high members of the society, Hugh Whitbread and Lady Bruton. Richard helps Lady Bruton writing a letter to the most famous and largest London's newspaper, the Times. After lunch, Richard intended to

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<sup>5</sup> This term will be explained later in the analysis of the Character Septimus and the trauma of the war.

tell Clarissa that he loves her by bringing a large bunch of roses. However, he failed. Clarissa thinks that it's important to maintain the privacy between husband and wife with a slight of distance. At the same time, she finds slightly disturbing that her husband does not know everything about her.

Throughout the day, characters remember a particularly significant time of their lives. Clarissa meets Elizabeth (Clarissa and Richard's only child) and her teacher of history and tutor, Miss Doris Kilman who are going shopping. Both Clarissa and Miss Kilman despise one another passionately believing the other to be an oppressive force over Elizabeth. Meanwhile, Septimus and Lucrezia are in their apartment, enjoying a moment of happiness together before the men come to take Septimus to the asylum. One of Septimus's doctors, Dr. Holmes, arrives, and Septimus fears the doctor will destroy his soul. In order to avoid this fate, he jumps from a window to his death.

Clarissa works hard to make her party successful where most of the novel's characters are assembled. Throughout the day, characters remember a particularly significant time of their lives, a summer spent at Clarissa's family home<sup>6</sup>, Bourton when she was eighteen. This summer was decisive for her life because she rejected Peter Walsh and decided to marry Richard Dalloway. She also experienced a youthful infatuation with a rebellious young girl, Sally Seton who appears also unexpectedly in Clarissa's party transformed into Lady Rosseter. She feels unsatisfied with her own

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<sup>6</sup> As Clarissa, Virginia Woolf spent her holidays at St. Ives in Cornwall and as said in Chapter One, the best memories of her childhood were there; after Virginia's mother death, the Stephens never returned there again.

role. All the partygoers, but especially Peter and Sally Seton, have, to some degree, failed to accomplish the dreams of their youth.

At the close of the novel the reader feels that he/she has not followed a story in a normal sense circled around Mrs. Dalloway both internally and externally, very little has happened. The novel ends with the appearance of Mrs. Dalloway on the stairs at her party under the admiring eyes and excitement of Peter Walsh. “It is Clarissa... For there she was” (Woolf MD 213).

## **II- Mrs Clarissa Dalloway**

### **A- Aristocracy, politics and parties**

As we have already stated before, the story turns around Clarissa Dalloway, the main character of the novel. Clarissa is a fifty years woman, who had recently suffered an illness which turned her hair white. One of her notable qualities is said to be that she knows people “almost by instinct” (Woolf MD 09) and never judges them.

Throughout the day, we keep coming back to the same past event happened years ago and the same people and seeing them from fresh point of views. This allows us to see Clarissa from different angles, both external and internal. Clarissa Dalloway struggles constantly to balance her internal life with the external world. Her



world consists of glittering surfaces, such as fine fashion, parties, and high society, but as she moves through that world she goes beneath those surfaces in search of deeper meaning filled with emotions. Peter Walsh accuses her of spoiling his life, and Sally Seton, now Lady Rosseter, blames her and never sympathized with Clarissa's choice of Richard Dalloway. Clarissa chose Richard rather than Peter for her security and great care for appearance: "the obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on the world" (67). She sacrificed passion for the security and tranquility of an upper class life.

As a perfect hostess, Clarissa cares a great deal about what people think of her. However, she is also self reflective; she often questions life's true meaning and has a horror of death. She wonders if happiness actually exists. These anxieties are reflected in her desire for privacy and her need to communicate with others. Peter Walsh remembers that even young, Clarissa had horror of death. As a young girl, she witnessed the death of her sister who was killed accidentally. Virginia Woolf lost her half sister Stella Duckworth, who took the place of her mother in the house, when she was young too. In addition, a series of deaths hurt deeply Virginia's mental state so that she tried to put an end to her life many times and fell into many depressions.

As the novel starts, Mrs. Dalloway goes out to buy some flowers to better her party. At Woolf's life, these kinds of parties are quite important in the political life. They allowed people to meet and to talk by taking leisure and pleasure. Generally, these kinds of meetings are arranged by women as does Clarissa. Virginia Woolf was

accustomed to the upper-class and political parties. She and her husband had a very active intellectual life; the Bloomsbury Group for example. Moreover, her Husband Leonard was a very active member in the Labour Party. Throughout the novel, the reader is kept informed of the passing of time through the day, by the chiming of clocks, most often of Big Ben, the clock at the House of Parliament in Westminster, the district of London where the Dalloways live.

### **B- Greenness, Menopause and sexuality**

The working title of Woolf during most of the time she was writing this novel was "The Hours". The sound of Clocks keeps us aware of the time passing in human lives. The analogy between the hours and the female life cycle, what we call now the "biological clock", is a major motif in *Mrs Dalloway*.

A set of female characters present the several ages of the woman. Elizabeth Dalloway is almost eighteen. Rezia (Lucrezia) is in her twenties. Milly Brush and Doris Kilman are past forty. Clarissa and Sally Seton are on the eve of their fifties. While Millicent Bruton is sixty-two, but she dreams of being a little girl playing with her brothers. Then, living in her memories of India and remembering the triumph of her book, Miss Helena Parry is in her eighties. Finally, there is the nameless old woman Clarissa sees from her window. Thus, the six ages of the woman are enumerated.

Throughout the day, Clarissa is haunted by the dirge from Cymbeline:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun

Nor furious winter's rages. (Woolf MD 10)

The heat of the sun stands for sexuality, to a kind of feminine blossoming like a fruit which comes into maturity in the heat of the summer; a reproductive cycle which ends in the winter of old age. Elizabeth is a "hyacinth which has had no sun" which means a virginal flower, as noted by Sally Seton. As a young girl, Clarissa's sexuality has always been filled with intense desire but muted. Her memory of erotic desire has the intensity of "a match burning in a crocus" (35). As years are passing by, her sexual potential decreased: she became frigid and, now, she sleeps no more with her husband.

In psychology, the colour green represents sexuality, sexual desire and fertility. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the colour of women's clothing is almost always green or nuances of green. Nancy Blow looks as if "her body had merely put forth, of its own accord, a green fill"(195). Septimus remembers Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress and sees his wife Rezia as a flowering tree. Clarissa admires old sea-green brooches at the jewelers and her favorite dress is a silver-green dress. Even Miss Kilman wears a green Mackintosh coat<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Kilman does not dress to please. She became a born-again Christian two years and three months ago. Poor, with a forehead like an egg, she is bitter and dislikes Clarissa intensely but adores Elizabeth.

Clarissa is shown at two important phases of the woman's life; sexual maturity at the age of eighteen and menopause or, as it is sometimes called "the little death", at the age of fifty-one. Menopause is not explicitly discussed in the novel but is implicitly linked with illness. In the 1920s, Woolf was obsessed with menopause even if she was in her early forties. She was troubled by the decision imposed upon her by her doctors that she should not have children. This is reflected in Sir William Bradshaw who forbade childbirth. Septimus' horror of body and reproduction, Rezia's longing for a baby and Clarissa's anxiety of "no more marrying, no more having children" (Woolf MD 11), reinforces the idea of menopause and sexuality:

There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday, they must disrobe... narrower narrower would her bed be. (33-4)

Menopause is treated as a kind of slow death which starts in "midday" (not yet the end of the day or night) of the woman's life.

### **III- Obsession of death, trauma and mental degradation**

Death is a repeated theme in Virginia Woolf's novels. Woolf suffered serious mental problems and tried to put an end to her life several times. First in 1895 after her mother's death, then in 1904, in 1912 and again in 1913, she attempted suicide. In *Mrs Dalloway*, both Clarissa and Septimus struggle to make sense of death.

Septimus Warren Smith was conceived to represent Woolf's experience of mental disintegration. Woolf does not develop any other aspect of Septimus's personality apart insanity which leads him to jump from a window to die. He is a twenty-four years old ancient veteran of the First World War. Little is known about his life. He is married to Lucrezia for five years and he seems to come from a lower-class background but he has some education and a great passion for literature and poetry just like Virginia.

Septimus mental problems is related to the Great War, as it is called at that time, when he repressed all feeling after his friend's, Evans, death. He became a figure specifically connected with the war. At Clarissa's party, Sir William Bradshaw discusses a Bill to deal with "the deferred effects of shell-shock" (Woolf MD 207). And Septimus is a symbolic shell-shock case. It's his incapacity to feel sadness for his friend Evan's death which filled him with guilt; because, he perceives it as a crime. During the war, many Bloomsbury intellectuals in Woolf's circle had been pacifist, but she also had many friends, including Siegfried Sasson, who experienced shell-shock.

In the novel, Virginia Woolf gives clear and detailed account of Septimus's incapacity to distinguishing between reality and hallucination. He has difficulties to make the difference between a man playing a penny whistle and a musical crescendo. He sees roses, which actually are the figure on the wallpaper, growing through his body. According to Septimus, he is able to read people's minds and know

the future. In short, Septimus is not just a sensitive man who has been traumatized by the war; he is also in the depth of serious mental illness.

The story of Septimus Warren Smith is completely unconnected with the Dalloway scenes. Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus never meet. They come from different parts of society; Clarissa is an upper-class woman while Septimus belongs to a lower class. At the level of plot, the connections between them are completely accidental. For example, they are all there in Bond Street at the same time. Later, Peter Walsh walks randomly by the Warren Smiths. Elizabeth passes by chance by their house on a bus. Sir William Bradshaw is the only person who actually meets Septimus. Clarissa hears about his death in the party she organized where Sir Bradshaw attended and talked about Septimus's suicide in that afternoon.

Virginia Woolf said in an Introduction to the American edition of *Mrs Dalloway* that "in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her (Clarissa's) double, had no existence;... Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party" ( Jeffars 200). In the actual story, it is Septimus who dies. Woolf Virginia connects between two characters; one sane and the other insane, one female and the other male both trying to make sense of death. As a young girl, explained Peter Walsh, Clarissa felt herself to be everywhere. She thought that we are not just the person that is visible; it is just the superficial part of ourselves. Dispersed parts of ourselves can be attached to other people even never spoken to. The kind of relationship she has with Septimus "somehow attached to this person or

that or even haunting certain places, after death” (Woolf MD 135). The fifty-one years old Clarissa still believes in the fragmentation of human beings. Like Septimus, Clarissa is obsessed by death. Clarissa feels “somehow like him- the young man who killed himself”.

## **Conclusion**

*Mrs Dalloway* is the expression of Virginia Woolf’s life through a pen and paper dictated by self experience. As a married woman to a politician, Virginia Woolf was very much familiar with organized parties like that given by Clarissa Dalloway, a menopausal frigid woman. People meet and talk there of their souvenirs and experiences as Virginia does in the novel. The party, thus, alludes to a means of oral expression; a major problem that women. In that respect, this is ironically expressed by Woolf by the means of writing. The First World War represents death and all the anxieties carried behind. Septimus Warren Smith was affected by shell shock caused by the horrors of the war; by death. As Septimus, Virginia was deeply affected by a series of death among her family which led to serious mental problems and emotional breakdowns consequently; death turns into obsession. Virginia makes of two opposing characters one sane and the other insane, one female and the other male, a parallel to demonstrate that men and women are not actually different. They are preoccupied and surrounded by the same matters; but their reactions are not similar because of social pressure and perception mainly concerning the question of women and men.

## Chapter Three

### ***To the Lighthouse*: the memory of childhood and young adulthood**

#### **Introduction**

*To the Lighthouse* is a story of marriage, childhood, a summer house, art and intellectual life. Contrarily to *Mrs Dalloway*, the passage of time is set by the consciousness of the characters rather than the big bong of a clock. The events of a single afternoon are narrated in over half the book, while the events of the following ten years are compressed in few pages. In the novel nothing happens actually; all the events take place in the character's mind. The following chapter is dedicated to Woolf's 1927's novel in order to depict her personal experience and the motifs which pushed her to write *To the Lighthouse*. The same steps will be followed as in the previous chapter starting from a plot summary, then moving to the main character study and the themes related to our purpose.

#### **I- *To the lighthouse*: Major events**

Unlike *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* is divided into three main sections; "The Window", "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse". The novel starts just before the First World War in peaceful moments. Mr. and Mrs. Dalloway bring their



eight children, Andrew, Jasper, Roger, Prue, Rose, Nancy, Cam and James, to their summer house in the Hebrides. There stands a big lighthouse. Little James, the youngest of the Ramsays children, insists to go to that large lighthouse across the bay, and Mrs. Ramsay tells him that they will go the day after if the weather permits. But Mr. Ramsay breaks the joy and excitement of the boy by commenting coldly on the bad state of the weather. Since from the beginning, Woolf gives the reader the images of a responsible, lovely, and affectionate mother (woman) and of a cold, educated and authoritarian father (man).

Mrs. Ramsay likes hosting people at her house. In that afternoon, the Ramsays greet a number of guests. Charles Tansley admires Mr. Ramsay's work as a metaphysical philosopher. At the house, there is Lily Briscoe, a young painter who begins a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay. This latter wants Lily to marry William Banks: an old friend of the family. But Lily wants to remain single and free. This is not the only marriage that she wants to arrange. Indeed; Mrs. Ramsay wants to match between Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, two of their acquaintances. This reminds us of Mrs. Bingley in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, who wants to marry her daughter and of Emma in her novel *Emma* who adores arranging marriages between her friends. This is a typically Victorian social behaviour.

Things start to take shapes and actions. Lily begins her painting. Paul asks Minta to marry him. Mrs Ramsay calms the energetic and resentful James. Mr Ramsay is preoccupied and worried by his shortcoming as a philosopher and searches comfort

from time to time turning to Mrs. Ramsay. However, the dinner party turned a little spicy. Paul and Minta return very late to the dinner party from their walk with two of the Ramsay's children as Minta lost her grandmother's brooch on the beach. Lily gets annoyed and angry by some comments made by Charles Transley who says that women can neither paint nor write. Mr. Ramsay reacts rudely when Augustus Carmichael, a poet, asks for a second plate of soup. The guests try to make of the dinner party a memorable evening despite the *faux-pas*. Mrs. Ramsay, who is looking for the perfect dinner, reflects that the events are already in the past; joy like the party cannot last. Later, she joins her husband on the parlor. The couple sits quietly when Mr. Ramsay asks suddenly his wife to avow her love for him. Mrs. Ramsay is a bit ashamed and she avoids looking at him. She stands by the window and repeated what her husband said earlier that evening that the weather will be too rough for a trip to the lighthouse. Even she does not answer, Mr. Ramsay know that she loves him. The "Window" section ends with a couple smiling to each other; an unspoken love scene.

As already mentioned above, time passes more quickly as the novel enters the second section; "Time Passes". It is the beginning of the First World War. The war breaks out across Europe. Andrew Ramsay, the oldest of the Ramsay's children, dies in a battle. Prue dies from an illness related to childbirth. Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly one night. A series of deaths shakes the family; no more holydays at the summerhouse. The house is turning into ruins. Ten years later, the family returns there. The house is rescued and things stars to go better especially after he coming of Lily Briscoe.

Time returns to slow in the last section: “The Lighthouse”. Mr. Ramsay declares that he, James and Cam will journey to the lighthouse. He becomes unbearable. His bad temper disturbs everybody and Lily, unlike Mrs. Ramsay is unable to provide him with sympathy. After Mrs. Ramsay’s death Mr Ramsay plunged into gloom and self-pity. During the trip on the boat, the children, especially James who has distant relationship with his father, experience a kind of connection with their fathers. Lily finally finishes her painting and achieves her vision across the bay

## **II- Childhood Memories**

### **A- Mrs. And Mr. Ramsay: the memory of loved parents**

The simple reading of *To the Lighthouse* suggest that the novel is about Virginia Woolf’s childhood and her relations with her parents. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay form a harmonious couple who got eight children. The Stephen’s, Virginia’s family, household contained eight children of three marriages too. *To the Lighthouse* to understand and deal with unresolved issues of mental breakdowns concerning both her parents.

Mrs. Ramsay emerges from the novel’s opening pages not only as a woman of great kindness and tolerance but also as a protector. Her primary goal is to preserve her youngest son James’s sense of hope and wonder surrounding the lighthouse. Even though she realizes that Mr. Ramsay is correct in declaring that foul weather will ruin the next day’s voyage, she persists in assuring James that the trip is possible. Mrs. Ramsay is a wonderful hostess who takes pride in making memorable experiences for

the guests at the family's summer home. She treats each of her guests with a great kindness and similarly even those who do not deserve it. She affirms traditional gender role, especially her behaviour with male guests. She believes that men, including her husband, need constant support and sympathy. She is in a constant struggle with her husband bad mood; but she often triumphs over him: "yes, you were right. It's going to be wet to-morrow;" she had not said it, but he knew it. And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again" ( Woolf TTL 134). She triumph and shows the ability to make of even the most ephemeral things something significant, such as a dinner party.

Mr. Ramsay is Mrs. Ramsay's husband. He is a prominent metaphysical philosopher. He fears more than everyone that his work is insignificant and that he will be forgotten in the future. His professional anxieties push him to be selfish and rude toward his family. He acts sometimes like a tyrant:

But what remained intolerable, she thought, sitting upright... was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some commands of his ; some insolence: 'Do this', 'Do that'; his dominance: his 'Submit to me'. ( Woolf TTL 184-5)

This is how Cam remembers her father. Even aware of how blessed and lucky to have such a wonderful family, Mr. Ramsay tends to punish his wife and children by a constant demand for support, sympathy and attention. Even he loves them very much. The mixture of courtly veneration and domination with which he treats his wife is a

product of the patriarchal system of the Victorian period. Mr. Ramsay stands as Mrs. Ramsay's opposite.

*To the Lighthouse* deals with unresolved issues concerning both Woolf's parents. The novel has that particular nostalgia of childhood and uncovered memory of dead parents. Virginia Woolf family and childhood are essential subjects. She explained that the obsession of her parents inspired her; "what would happened?" without these memories, "no writing and no books-inconceivable". She continues adding that she "was obsessed by them both, unhealthily, & writing of them was a necessary act" ( Woolf TTL xxxiii). *To The Lighthouse* kept them in her mind. Thus, Virginia Woolf invented her own therapy; she wrote about her obsession with both her parents.

### **B- Summerhouse and the Lighthouse**

According to her memoires, Virginia Woolf's best memories were those spent with her family in their summerhouse, Talland House at St. Ives in Cornwall, where the family spent every summer until 1895 when her mother died. Talland House, looked out over Porthminster Bay, and is still standing today, though somewhat altered. Memories of these family holidays and impressions of the landscape ; especially the Godrevy Lighthouse.

Woolf's father began renting Talland House in St Ives in 1882, shortly after Woolf's own birth. The house was used by the family as a vacation house during the summer for the next ten years. The location of the main story in *To the Lighthouse* is

in Hebridean Island. The house there was formed by Woolf in imitation of Talland House. Many real features from St Ives Bay are inserted into the story, including the gardens leading to the sea, the sea itself, and the lighthouse.

There are many similarities between the novel and Woolf's souvenirs concerning Talland House. Indeed, after her mother's death, her father Leslie Stephen plunged into gloom and self-petty, as Mr Ramsay, and never returned to St Ives. Virginia's brother, Adrian, was not allowed to go on an expedition to Godrevy Lighthouse. Similarly in *To the Lighthouse*, James wants to go to the lighthouse but the trip is canceled because of weather conditions.

Although in the novel the Ramsays return to the house after the war, the Stephens had given up the house after Julia Stephens, Virginia's Mother, death in 1895. After the war, Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa visited Talland House under its new owner. Again later, long after her parents were dead, Woolf repeated the journey.

### **III- Trauma of death**

*To the Lighthouse* is not excluded from the theme of death. In fact, the novel is about three lives which pass away, according to Virginia Woolf, very suddenly and very quickly. The novel is also about something ending, reflected by many things ending. Woolf's fear of death, or rather of nervous depressions caused by the death of beloved people is once again expressed in *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf devotes the long “Window” section practically to the marvelous Mrs. Ramsay and the dinner party organized by her. There are some frictions among the guests and the family that she always manages to arrange with success. Even the end of this section ends with her great ability to triumph over her bad-tempered husband. However, as the next section of the book starts, “time passes” very quickly. A series of successive deaths within the Ramsay family are described briefly as someone running away from a delicate situation. Moreover, the words pointing at their death are put between brackets echoing the murmurs of a confession. “(Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness.)” ( Woolf TTL 144) Two paragraphs after, “(a shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death mercifully, was instantaneous.)” ( Woolf TTL 145) Mrs. Ramsay for whom a whole section was consecrated dies in one sentence between brackets: “(She died very sudden at the end, they said.)” ( Woolf TTL 148) It is always other people who report the bad news. “They said” that Mrs. Ramsay died suddenly that Andrew’s death was instantaneous and that “nobody deserved happiness more”.

The happiness of Virginia Stephen Woolf started to vanish after the death of her mother in 1895. After this tragedy, Woolf experienced mental breakdowns. Her problems get worst after the series of death which followed just after, the death of her half sister and her father. However, it was the first chock that marked her more. “I have had my vision” ( Woolf TTL 225), Lily closes the novel. There are two paintings

in the novel; the one Lily starts in the “Window” and the one she starts again in “The Lighthouse”. Lily takes Mrs. Ramsay as a model at the beginning of the novel but never achieves it. Then, ten years pass after Mrs. Ramsay’s death, her vision becomes clearer; the vision of a mother projected from the mind into a canvas in the illumination of a lighthouse. This was a kind of release after a struggle with the ghost of the past that Virginia Woolf expresses through Lily’s painting.

This idea of ending, illumination and release is reinforced by the number of endings for example Mrs. Ramsay’s story to James, the last volume of *Middlemarch* left on the train by Minta, the end of Scott’s story that Mr. Ramsay reads after dinner, the book he finishes as his journey to the lighthouse ends; “Mr Ramsay had almost done reading. One hand hovered over the page as if to be in readiness to turn it very instant he had finished it” ( Woolf TTL 219), and of course as noted above Lily’s vision and the end of the novel. Because its subject is death, *To the Lighthouse* has too much to do with endings.

## **Conclusion**

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf paints the canvas of her childhood and early adulthood. According to her memoirs and manuscripts, the trauma of her parent’s death inspired Virginia Woolf to write. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay represent lovely parents who enjoyed a happy marriage with a large recomposed family. The Stephen Family as the Ramsay family lived happily, especially during the vacation when they spent their time in their summerhouse, until the mother’s, both the person and the



character, deaths' that completely turned their lives upside-down. However, writing *To the Lighthouse* was a release for the writer by expressing her sensibility and sensation of good and bad moments of her childhood.

## General Conclusion

Generally feminism which is anti-masculine in essence identifies inequalities and injustices in the way girls and women are treated in a particular society and the disabilities and disadvantages which result from these. However, feminist writers sometimes exaggerate when holding utopian views and idealizing women. Instead of concentrating on how women should live in a quite unlikely world, they better focus on the way women live in reality. In the feminine novel, however, writers give detailed depictions of women's lives, ideas, emotions and preoccupations including a lot of feelings. Virginia Woolf, who is more feminine than feminist, treats both feminine and feminist problems in her two novels, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf tackles the importance of the competence of a woman in organizing parties for political purposes. The task of women in politics is limited to preparing the necessary food and the right décor. In addition, she has to be presentable in order to please the guests and the masculine assembly. Mrs. Dalloway buys flowers, dresses for the party, and is anxious about her guests' opinions of her sense of organization. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay devotes all her attention to her male guests because she thinks that they are important in the running of the world. Woolf's anti-masculine attitude is shown in her constant bad representation of the man. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith is attributed madness and Mr.

Dalloway shows distance and 'frigidity' and indifference towards his wife. In *To the Lighthouse*, men such as Mr. Ramsay, Charles Tansley and Augustus Carmichael are short, ignorant and graceless; qualities that do not seem to bother them so much as they find compensation in the standard masculine superiority.

What is striking in *Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse* is Woolf's sensitivity and sensibility when writing about her life experience and her problems as a woman like sexuality as well as social and domestic duties. In fact, Virginia Woolf witnessed a dramatic change, almost turmoil, in her private and social life. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf refers to her experience by evoking war and political parties with which she became familiar when she married Leonard Woolf, and to the madness of Septimus that evokes her own mental breakdowns. In *To the Lighthouse*, she evokes her own childhood and gives a portrait of a happy family saddened and ultimately torn apart by a series of deaths, especially the mother's death that changed their lives, exactly the way her mother's death had changed her own life in 1895 when she was still Virginia Stephens. The idea of death is constantly present and is persistently echoed in both novels.

Woolf establishes a parallel between two opposed characters, one sane and the other insane, one female and the other male, Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus; a parallel to demonstrate that men and women are not actually different. They are preoccupied and surrounded by the same matters; but their reactions are not similar because of social pressure and an innate perception that often a man and a woman

react differently. She holds, in *A Room of One's Own*, that women need paper to write and space to evolve far from man's obsessive desire to overprotect her. Men and women do not have the same freedom to express themselves. The parties organized by Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay, ironically refer to women's difficulties to communicate by means of speech. Writing for women, thus, comes as a confession and communication. The fact of attributing adjectives like feminine and feminist to the literature written by women is in itself a recognition of the existence of women's writing as a form of communication and expression. As such women's literature deserves the given denominations, but by no means do they imply that it is inferior to men's writings. It is simply literature written by women dealing with the same topics that are viewed from a different perspective by someone from the opposite sex since men and women do not have the same experiences. The feminist critic, George Henry Lewes, in his *The Lady Novelist* claims that the emergence of women's literature had much to do with a description of their lives and experiences and that men and women live differently and, thus, have different experiences.

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925) was written before *To the Lighthouse* (1927) but if a comparison is to be made between Woolf's life and the two novels, it will be clear that the events in the latter precede the events in the former since *To the Lighthouse* goes back to the author's childhood. In both novels, Virginia Woolf treats the notion of time in a quite original way. In *Mrs Dalloway*, time is regulated by the sound of clocks far from the physical setting of the novel and in *To the Lighthouse*, time varies

in length. What can be derived from these two novels is that time does not cure old hurts and Woolf, even in her forties, was still affected by her childhood and by the deaths of her parents. Her life and memories are reflected through a writing prism as a parallel between actual experiences and fiction, “two blocks related by a corridor”, as she says in her manuscripts of *To the Lighthouse*. In short, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and Woolf’s life are two blocks related by the corridor of writing as a means of therapy of self-experience.

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