



The conflict of Reality and Thought in Mrs Dalloway as inspired by Virginia Woolf's Life

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Abstract— *The paper delves into the ocean of reality and thought as they exist in coordination as well as paradox in Virginia Woolf's one of its kind novel Mrs. Dalloway. It also aspires to understand the deeper reasons that lead to Virginia writing such characters which seem far apart in their experience but are uniquely similar when seen from the lens of thought. Virginia's personal life effected the characters' consciousness, and their reactions to certain situations also find root in her own life. The concept of stream of consciousness was not new in the twentieth century but its employment was certainly unique in Mrs Dalloway, which made it popular among the public in general. It endeavours to understand the characters of Clarissa and Septimus in relation with Virginia's interpretation of "stream of consciousness", and the depiction of reality as driven by Virginia's life and thought process.*

Keywords— *Clarissa, Mrs. Dalloway, Reality, Stream of Consciousness, Septimus, Thought, Virginia Woolf.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between reality and thought was born with human and might only end with its extinction. Being human itself means the struggle between perception and truth. The idea of nationalism and the realities of war are often a reason of discourse but while it's only a subject of discourse for some it is reality for few other. Out of this conflict is born the character of Septimus Warren Smith. He was a scholar and a romantic, before he went to war but after war he was only a shadow of war. Septimus, whose love for debate on writings of Shakespeare defined his character, could not decipher his emotions on his comrade Evan's death in war. It was like he was stuck in that moment and could not move beyond it. His feelings towards Evan might have been more than of a friend but he never got to examine those before Evan died. He married Lucrezia to escape Evan's death which ended up in a broken marriage. After the war, the whole existence of Septimus was ruled by his inadequacy to feel, which in turn intensely skewed his perception of reality. He began to have hallucinations and episodes of trauma which is actually common in PTSD patients. Something today we know as post traumatic stress disorder

or commonly PTSD was only an "imbalance of proportion" for Dr. Holmes, who advised for Septimus to simply be retrained for civil society in a medical institution but denied to address the deeper psychological issues.

Similarly Clarissa is still stuck in her maidenhood, between her rejection of Peter and attraction towards her lively friend Sally. Even though she married Richard Dalloway she aches for the road not taken. Clarissa rejected Peter because of his social standing but still craves his acknowledgment. Sally's unrepentant nature attracted young Clarissa but the need for social acceptance made Clarissa reject her feelings towards Sally. Every action of Clarissa's present has an unsaid longing of past. Clarissa now, that she can not bear any more children finds herself in an identity crisis because she has been conditioned to believe that her existence as a woman is only to bear children for her husband in the name of marital duty. As Clarissa ages, her sense of loss escalates and she finds it hard to retain her identity as a woman. She often reminisces her youth. Although she does not resent her decision of marrying Richard, she certainly questions her choice now.

Both Septimus and Clarissa are detached from their reality but perceived differently because Clarissa manages to perform as per the social norms set in place to provide a structure to reality but Septimus has lost all his will to be part of a society which does not see reality in its rawest form as he has been forcefully subjected to, through war.

II. PARADOX OF THOUGHT AND REALITY

Virginia Woolf with her technique of stream of consciousness presents a paradox of reality and thought. We perceive things not just by looking at them but our perceptions are influenced by our past experiences and complexes. An object could mean one thing to one and the same object could lead another to an entirely different reaction. Like the backfiring engine of a grand vehicle seen by both Clarissa and Septimus has different meaning for both. One sees it with respect, as a symbol of royalty and induces a feeling of nationalism where in, for Septimus it leads to a shell shock (a form of post traumatic stress disorder often found in war veterans). Both the reactions are justified and inspired from perception of reality and truth of experience.

Woolf seems to believe strongly that ones thought models ones reality. Ones conscious thought steer's ones reality which may or may not entirely be the actual reality. What one thinks perpetuates their behaviour and their feelings towards reality. The thoughts are certainly real but they do not exist beyond ones awareness which makes them as unreal as time, to someone else. Through stream of consciousness Virginia gives us an insight in human thought and in turn the reality as it exist differently for every human being.

A very peculiar thing about Mrs Dalloway as a novel is that it seems to insinuate that everyone is waiting for their death and living only in waiting for one day to die. We find repetition of a line over and over from Shakespeare's Cymbeline

“ Fear no more the heat o’the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rage.”

Since the thought is temporary, it makes human existence temporary as well; which leads to death being the ultimate reality of life. Although initially Clarissa seems to be fun and full of life but it is only when we look behind the veil of a carefully constructed image to comply with the societal notion of normalcy, we find Clarissa not very different from Septimus. Clarissa's reality is vastly different that is from Septimus but Both Clarissa and Septimus are living in a state of daze waiting for death. Loosing themselves a little every day. Their lives are struck in moments from past and now they live only in derivation of life through various

paradigms of people and societal expectations. Clarissa's admiration of Septimus for choosing death seems to further strengthen this argument.

III. WOOLF'S LIFE AND STRUGGLE

Virginia herself lived a conflicted existence. Her childhood was marred by sexual abuse from her half brother and rest of her life is marked by misandry. Virginia being a lesbian had to struggle constantly with relationships and could never find a stable companion, at the same time dealing with the social repercussions of being with a women. She may very closely relate with Clarissa for her longing for being with Sally. As Clarissa seems to describe her life as simply an existence, having lived for only a moment when she kissed Sally. On top of it Virginia suffered with bipolar disorder which made it harder for her to separate reality from hallucination, very much like Septimus. But none of this stops Virginia from delivering a masterpiece like Mrs Dalloway which presents reality with a stream of consciousness and asks the greater question of our thoughts fabricating our reality. Virginia tried to commit suicide thrice and succeeded the fourth time in ending her life but her death in no means an end of her thoughts. Virginia preserved her notion of reality through characters like Clarissa and Septimus.

IV. CONCLUSION

“Past is a place of reference, not a place of residence; Past is a place of learning, not a place of living.”

The horrors of war follow Septimus and the ghost of past doesn't let go of Clarissa. Both the characters struggle to make peace with the reality of their present but ultimately are a slave of their past. Their dark past weighs on their conscious thought and in turn their reality becomes gloomy and tragic. It is only this gloom of past that lead Virginia to end the journey of her life.

“Reality is a projection of your thoughts the things you habitually think about”

Although thoughts influence reality it can not be denied that reality influence thought as well. The key is to be conscious of our thoughts always. For when our thoughts are conscious and optimistic we can then create the reality we truly desire.

There is so much that Virginia leaves to debate, if only Virginia could leave her past behind and find peace in her present, if only she could accept her sexuality, if only her thought would not have been tinged with what is forgone she could have created a reality for herself which soothed her mind rather than alleviate it, she could have lead a more

fulfilling and prosperous life. The same applies to the characters of Septimus and Clarissa, but since both these character are a shade of Virginia's life, how could they be any different in their projection.

There has to be no conflict between thought and reality. They can coexist in harmony because the only difference between our thought and our reality is the energy we put in our thoughts.

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