

Stream of consciousness , and the impact of war in Virginia Woolf's “ Mrs. Dalloway”

تيار الوعي وأثر الحرب في رواية: "Mrs. Dalloway" ل: فرجينيا وولف.

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الملخص :

هذه المقالة هي محاولة لدراسة خاصيتين من بين أهم خصائص الحداثة في الأدب الإنجليزي ألا وهما، أولا: استعمال تقنية تيار الوعي ، أو ما يسمى بـ: stream of consciousness وثانيا : أثر الحرب في رواية "Mrs Dalloway" . وهي رواية مشهورة للكاتبة والأديبة الإنجليزية فرجينيا وولف Virginia Woolf. والخاصية الأولى هي من بين المظاهر التي تُميّز الكتاب والروائيين في بداية القرن العشرين ، عندما أرادوا نوعا جديدا من الرواية يتماشى مع واقع الناس في ذلك الوقت . كما أنّ تلك التقنية الجديدة في الرواية تتيح للكاتب التركيز على الجانب النفسي الداخلي للشخصيات، على خلاف ما كانت عليه الحال قبل ذلك. أما الخاصية الثانية فهي التركيز على الآثار الجسيمة والمدمرة للحرب على نفوس المواطنين ، وخاصة الذين شاركوا فيها ، إذ تركت في نفوسهم أثارا بليغة أدت إلى ظهور أمراض نفسية وإلى حالة من التنافر وعدم الثقة بين الناس .

Introduction:

There is no total agreement on when Modernism has begun , whether in the nineteenth century or it just started later in the twentieth century. What critics agree upon is that Modernism occupied the period from the first years of the twentieth century , and peaked around 1918 primarily due to World War I Modernism was a reaction to the Victorian era , *"Although each generation tends to reject the previous one, the generation that came of age in what we have come to call the Modernist period may have had more cause than any other generation to reject the values and traditions of its predecessors". (1)*

in Britain there was a sense of skepticism and uncertainty, people trusted no more the old and conventional ways of living of the Victorians and wanted a radical and revolutionary change , especially in the aftermath of World War I which was called the Great War . Virginia Woolf wrote one of her most known novels , Mrs. Dalloway in 1925 . In this essay we will explore the stream of consciousness technique in Mrs. Dalloway and World War I theme in the novel .

" On or about December 1910 human nature changed.... All human relations shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature."(2)

The above quote by Virginia Woolf suggests that in the beginning of the twentieth century everything about people's lives had changed , and so did literature at that time. Virginia Woolf ,who was born in 1882, is one of the main authors and novelists of the Modernist period ; her very popular novel ***Mrs. Dalloway*** is a typical and clear example of Modernism. The novel is a story of one June day in London in 1923 as Clarissa Dalloway, the protagonist is throwing a party and inviting people ; her husband is a politician named Richard. When walking outside , Clarissa sees Peter Walsh an old friend of her who has returned from India recently . another main character is Septimus Smith a war veteran who suffers from psychological and mental problems due to the war , Septimus eventually in the novel committed suicide.

One of the most prevalent techniques used by Modernist novelists is stream of consciousness . This term was coined by in 1890, by the American philosopher and psychologist William James .

"Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instant. It is nothing jointed: it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life ." (3)

It is " a term used variously to describe either the continuity of impressions and thoughts in the human mind, or a special literary method for representing this psychological principle in unpunctuated or fragmentary forms of interior monologue ." (4)

In the second half of the nineteenth century more importance was given to psychology and to the human mind , so writers used stream of consciousness to reveal what goes in the minds and selves of characters. as mentioned above stream of consciousness is the focus on the inner workings of the mind of characters, and sometimes it is called the interior monologue . It was a new way of narrating used in the twentieth century by Modernist writers who sought to establish a different kind of literature unlike that of the previous era . They tried to experiment with narration and dealt with new themes. Unlike literature of the 19th century , Modernists focuses more and spotlight on the inside self and mind rather than the outside , they try to explore and present the thoughts of characters to the reader from the point of view of the character. The following are examples of the use of stream of consciousness in Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf :

" Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning - fresh as if issued to children on a beach What a lark! What a plunge "(5)

readers are introduced to the continuous flow of thoughts of characters ,and to their ordinary thinking. We can see how ideas are processed in the mind of Clarissa, as she is moving from one idea to

another . first she is thinking of buying the flowers by herself, and then thinks about Lucy, who is a maid in the Dalloway house . the stream of thoughts continues as she is considering the coming of Rumpelmayer ' men , and then she thinks about the morning All these diverse thoughts are interwoven together in the mind of Clarissa .

"I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was. " (6)

The speaker here is Peter, who is a close friend of Clarissa , thinking of his feelings towards Clarissa who rejected his marriage proposal once . We are directly introduced to his inner flow of thoughts . first he wants to come back from India to England , then he recalls his Impassioned feelings towards Clarissa .

World War I had a great impact on people as well as on modernist writers . The influence of the war is prevalent in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway .

"Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. " (7)

People who survived the war were disillusioned and disappointed , thus they found it difficult to resume their lives due to the horrors they experienced in the war . *"Eventually, the survivors realized the meaninglessness of their sacrifice and the helplessness of the individual before the war machine. They were disillusioned. They were even more so when they returned to their hometown to see an unbridgeable gap between them and the civilians . "* (8)

"Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shoveled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle. Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her " (9)

Septimus is always thinking about the war , he feels He has been betrayed by the believes he once held like many soldiers that they are fighting in the war to end the suffering in the world and when they return they will be regarded as heroes , but by the end of the war they found a society suffering from the impacts of the war . Like many soldiers he feels lost in the

aftermath of the war. Although Septimus was suffering mentally and psychologically, he always thinks of Clarissa, he always wanted to tell her that he loved her.

"No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain / Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk. / Of course they're 'longing to go out again', - / These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk. / They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed / Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died, - / Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud / Of glorious war that shatter'd their pride... / Men who went out to battle, grim and glad; / Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad." (10)

Septimus, who is a character in the novel, represents the generation of men who witnessed the horrors of the war. Septimus is a War veteran who survived the war but still greatly suffering from its effects. He has a shell shock, and bitter memories of death and war haunt him; as the memories of his friend Evans who was killed in the war always come to his mind. Even his relationship with his Italian wife is getting worse, they are both feeling lonely, when she married him she expected to have a better life and be a mother. But after five years of marriage she has no children because Septimus did not want to.

"Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship" (11). He is not feeling any emotions any more, the war left him like many soldiers suffering, physically, mentally, and psychologically.

Septimus is having a great difficulty trying to live in a society where everything was not the same, because there was an enormous sense of distrust, pessimism, and a complete disorder. He could not communicate with others so he felt neglected and forgotten, at the end he believed that the right thing for him to do is to end his life, and that was what he did when he was taken to doctors to cure him, but none of them could help him and he committed suicide in an attempt to escape from them by jumping from the window.

"Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone." (12)

Septimus felt helpless and disappointed , thus he thought his only choice to get rid of his suffering is to kill himself . the reader of the novel feels sympathy for him because he is shown as a victim of the war . He is an example of the young men who fought in the war thinking that they are helping their countries, but when the war was over. The great war changed people's perception of life and death , the new machinery and heavy weapons used in the battlefields and the huge number of casualties of the war left people frightened and massively shocked . they believed that life can end at any moment. Being a victim of the war , Septimus Warren Smith believed the war has changed people to the worst , because it instilled in them feelings of horror , distrust , and alienation .

“One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities” (13).

Conclusion :

Literary Modernism is a major movement in world literature, it encompasses a wide range of new techniques ,styles, and themes in writing . Among the most crucial and influential ones are the use of Stream of consciousness in narration , and the theme of war in literary works . Modernism in Literature sparked due to the immense changes in society in the early years of the Twentieth century mainly because of the First World War which changed people's conception of life. They felt helpless in front of the devastating effects of its horrors. They sought a new way of living as they could not trust the authorities any more . The war had a great impact on people's lives as new mental and psychological problems started to occur ; that led writers to explore these problems in new way of narration that is called Stream of Consciousness which permits the writer to transmit the inner thoughts of their characters in a natural way and as they flow in the mind . the use of this technique enables the reader to know what exactly is happening in the self and mind of the characters .

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