

# Restitution in Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

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## **Abstract:**

Through her work Virginia Woolf treats the mind of man and heals the minds of women. She delineates the sensitive relationship between man and woman. Emerging from parties of upper-middle class families Clarissa comes to realization that stability and acceptance in life is the fundamental aspect, just after the death news of Septimus who was suffering from after effect of shell shock. She makes the very existence as a revolutionary matter. Here, all the feelings of a day with the essence of truthfulness is vividly described. The mental illness is part of Woolf's bipolar disorder partly. The love triangle of Peter Walsh, Clarissa Dalloway and Richard Dalloway is also portrayed. Failed relationship between Rezia and Septimus is also portrayed. Richard's relationship with Sally is a bit of humorous and the character of Sally is described like a saint who inspires many readers. The story inspires communications and connections within society as the foremost for a well functioning of society.

**Keywords:** structuralism, communication, deconstruction

## **1. Introduction:**

Is it a story of pride? In the inception it will feel like that but in the course of the text it is evident that Virginia Woolf has used the tool of Stream of Consciousness which was coined by William James in The Principles of Psychology in 1890, for shedding of pride by oneself without any tragedy or catharsis and acknowledgement of the inner self of every living human, where she is treating and examining the self. By a thorough analysis of the text we realize that the whole book describes a whole way of life amidst war-torn England. That is the ultimate and clear connotation. The plot is designed very simply indicating the realities and absurdities simultaneously prevalent through Stream of Consciousness. It is such a text reading which any teacher would become ambitious to write a book of his own.

Stream of Consciousness acts as an interpreter of consciousness as a continuously flowing stream of thoughts rather than discrete moments, a much deeper form of internal monologue, sometimes representing chaotic, unfiltered thoughts without an authors mediation. So through this unique model we can assume that thought of self-restraint on the part of the author, heading towards a greater understanding of a text with a free mind ready to conquer by love of intelligence and acceptance of the single unit called world was the motto of Virginia Woolf in Mrs Dalloway.

If we consider the whole book as a body we will find that it in some way or the other this book follows Structuralism.

The secret weaved in this piece of work is that it could be considered as the precursor of Prague School epistemology. As in Prague School epistemology postulated a fundamental difference between ordinary readers and expert students of literature. According to Jakobson, a poet like a musical composition,

“Affords the ordinary reader the possibility of an artistic perception, but produces neither the need nor the competence to effect a scientific analysis” (Dialogues, pp n6ff).

In post-war structuralism, this epistemological principle was reinforced by the mathematical theory of communication (Cherry, Communication, pp, 8gff). But the Prague school scholars were aware that a student of human communication is more than an engineer of signals, because he has to deal with semantic and cultural phenomenon; his epistemic position is not fixed but mobile, depending on the character and aim of inquiry. In a ‘preliminary stage’ he can assume the posture of ‘the most detached and external onlooker’, of a ‘cryptanalyst’; but this stage leads to an ‘internal approach’ to the language studied, when the observer assumes the role of

“A potential or actual partner in the exchange of verbal messages among the members of the speech community, a passive or even an active fellow member of that community”(Jakobson, ‘Linguistics and Communication’, SW III, p 574).

Hence, as Septimus utters, “Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—he mutters”—we find that there being a faint relation between structuralism and mental health. Mrs Dalloway was published on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1925 and Prague school of Linguistics came in around 1929 in a Czech paper of Jakobson’s where the label ‘structuralism’ was coined:

‘were we to summarize the leading idea of present-day science in its most various manifestations, we could hardly find a more appropriate designation than structuralism. Any set of phenomenon examined by contemporary science is treated not as a mechanical agglomeration but as a structural whole, and the basic task is to reveal the inner, whether static or developmental, laws of this system’. (quoted in ‘Retrospect’, SW II, p.711)

Since Virginia Woolf finds Stream of Consciousness as tool in the book, the technique being her soul, she examines the whole life of a, be it, person, society etc. to grow or show its evolution. Now in this context, we can say that if human body be considered as a structure throughout the course of reading we find some growth and decline of the path or the characters deeds or their fortunes. It is definitely like a miracle on the part of Prague Linguistic Circle and likewise Virginia Woolf, and the whole world of literary argument or theory, in whatever way we say to devise structuralism. Minutely observed we can find correlation of the theory with our body, as the greatest structure.

In the story Septimus Warren Smith is a WWI veteran, who suffers from a PTSD(shell shock), hallucination and isolation from wife Rezia due to inability of communication with each other. During the war he left alone his friend Evans, hence he developed mental disorders. Woolf describes the futility of war and that of patriarchal wonted system. Whatever she says it is revolutionary.

As for mental illness of Septimus, it is regretful that Virginia Woolf too drowned herself in the river Ouse. If Prague Linguistic Circle had came earlier, probably she would not have drowned herself. The theory is such a lively entity. Woolf’s Stream of Consciousness points toward understanding of deeper meanings of the reading in turn the realities of existence, and, if structuralism is considered it came later, but served

the purpose of ‘the conceptual system of every particular discipline is a web of internal correlations. Every concept is determined by all the others and in turn determines them.’ Again Septimus says about communications. So, it is all about connections, which, had been present in front of Virginia Woolf, she would have written other genres. But it is a blessing in disguise, otherwise we would have missed quenching our thirst with her best writings on feminism.

The story all the way starts from the happiness of preparation for conducting a party at Clarissa Dalloway’s home, for which she went to buy flowers and returned with the experience of a tire bursting of a motor car. However, the story begins like a content mind in the situation but as the story rolls the captivity of different sizes of cages is revealed. There are middle class people with begrudging love, love triangle, unsuccessful marriage, and conflicting loyalties, mental illness due to aftereffect of shellshock. The whole novel centres on a single day. Starts with party and ends in suicide of Septimus, inculcating realization in Clarissa that death is inevitable. And feeling akin to the death she embraces her decision as that of a pure soul. Sally herself the pure soul and Peter are anxious about her as she enters alone in a room and Clarissa chooses the beauties of life and the meaningful pursuits of life, beyond parties and show off, returning to a life of thinking and as Sally said: “Richard has improved, you are right I shall go and talk to him”. And as Lady Rosseter said, “what does the brain matter, compared with the heart?”

As of us, the postmodern readers, we have high expectations from whatever we read. Same in the case of Virginia Woolf, we think to confront some feminism stuff, we are rather overjoyed, she, through her narrative not only shows feminine distress or issues but from the very beginning, rather throughout the novel she establishes feminism. She could be considered as the greatest feminist of all time, she is her own example, engrossed in her work, something more than ‘staunch’ feminist, she led her whole life in the path she observed in her works, which might be the result of her deep intellectual bonding of companionship with her husband. At the end she performed euthanasia. However, she came out triumphant in her test of writing one of the best novels for women. If a woman can’t socialize, she can keep herself befriended by reading her work—the greatest benefit of all of her works being this. She maintained feminism in the thoughts and simple articulating of words within the whole 202 pages novel, without any hesitation and full ascendancy, as if she is the first spokesperson of the womankind.

In her writings she bridges the gap between the other literary genres and the feminism. She places a woman on one side and the whole world on the other. She acquaints women to their hidden powers to have a literature of their own, rather a world of their own. And she uses Stream of Consciousness technique to maintain buoyancy of the woman mind, and world with the outer world. She unearths the instincts of women, called by the society as whims and sabotaging of everyday will, such as making family with a torturous and stubborn husband like Clarissa, repressing of emotions of affairs of young age. There is one theme of the high, society as not a matter of coziness but imposed as a cage for women. It is revolutionary in the sense that, it circulates around the whole of woman mind and life and her ups and downs, her experiences in the domicile life or outside of her house and in the end Clarissa’s consciousness of the life full of activity rather than leading a life searching happiness and failing every time to attain it.

The leitmotif of the novel is ‘communication’, and ‘drawing room’. Whenever frustration appears we find the word ‘communication’, it is worthy of noticing in both Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, which refers to disconnections within societies. Whatever Woolf has written was her attempt to break the cage and express her thoughts about woman existence i.e, she was finding a bank where she could lean

and shed her pride, tearing all the barriers of society. And drawing room comes whenever a support system has to be established which indicates the sensual effect of luxury in the then upper middle-class families. It was the only place to be together, and expresses the lack of socialization. The motif of the work being the importance of associating in society to keep up the well-functioning of the humankind in its entirety, she frames the story as a narrative text featuring all the characters floating side by side and she delves from one character dialogue to another frequently which male counterparts will think feminine but this was her utmost urge to find peace in socially as well as politically and expresses the innate ability of women to write and think.

As we see Woolf's use of words such as 'for in a marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him', so it is definitely pointing to suffrage and body rights.

Again, the character Sally Seton expresses her love for her own country says "as we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship( her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical metaphor), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (Huxley again); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as possibly we can". She is like an intelligent pivotal character and a giving person who cracks small jokes with Richard, is created with great care by Woolf. She raises questions "did it make any real difference to one's feelings to know that before they'd married she had had a baby? It was indeed a daring question during that time.

She alludes to Cymbeline by William Shakespeare, Keats and Antony and Cleopatra. She says "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" which for both Septimus and Clarissa is a mantra to consider death as not something to fear, but as a release from struggles of life, and also she alludes to Shelley's Adonais, and historical figures like Marie Antoinette and Admiral Nelson. Also Othello in the phrase "If it were now to die,/ 'Twere now to be most happy" is referenced to express Clarissa's intense joy with Sally and later in the news of Septimus' death.

Deconstruction follows in the end when each and every character undergoes purification of their thoughts and everybody is returned to their own abode of thoughts but in a more maturity.

Whatever Woolf had said has been revolutionary in various aspects with some strong women, all of Woolf's works are revolutionary in such ways, it makes such effect on teenagers that they feel like becoming an author and that is no more a tough task. The whole course of reading seems to be like parting away from norms and participating in the youthful joys of the cosmos. Virginia Woolf brought us back to boons of learning to write a book of our own and Septimus brought Clarissa back. A writer is born. Whatever be the revolution like, at last we are restituted to our own home by teaching us the 'artist's way'.