



## Gender discrimination in virginia woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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### Abstract

This paper examines *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf, a novel from feminist perspective. It analyses how the novelist has developed innovative literary techniques to reveal woman's experience and to provide an alternative to male dominated view of reality. The novel explores such feminist issues as the necessity or even desirability of marriage for woman and the theme of isolation. The pattern of this novel is woven with extreme delicacy, and the various elements from Mrs. Dalloway's past brought into the present through a variety of persuasive devices. The prose itself is carefully cadenced and at times almost poetic, though never rhetorical. The highly individual sense of significance which provides the basis for the plot pattern is conveyed through style and imagery, through the suggestiveness and cunning of the language. The novel emphasizes a new identity for women. It begins departing them from their determined biological sex role to a role representing who they are as an individual person. The new identity allows women the power of thinking and standing up for their rightful place in society. By using female resistance spirit, Woolf starts to tear down the stereotypical view that all women must subject themselves to the supremacy of men.

**Keywords:** Sex, stereotypes, subjugation, victimization, liberty

### Introduction

*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is widely considered as one of the most important works of the twentieth century. Laura Marcus (2000) <sup>[11]</sup> marks that "the complex geopolitical unconscious of the novel does not juxtapose form and them (12)". With this ambitious novel, Woolf established herself as one of the leading writers of the modernism. The novel develops the innovative literary techniques to reveal women's experience and to prove an alternative to male-dominated views of the society. However, the novel is a meditation on time and how humans reckon with its relentless passage.

The settings for the novel that established Virginia Woolf as a leading writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Mrs. Dalloway*, is in urban London. The novel is full of street names, places names, specific shops, identifiable city monuments, and building that convey a picture of London in the early 1920s, and that make the picture historical and remote from a contemporary London urban setting that we might think have today. In her diary, Woolf tells us explicitly: "I want to criticize the social system, and show it at work, at its most intense" (Volume II: 248). Woolf's narrative style in *Mrs. Dalloway* is quite similar to that of a diary entry, actually. She was self-conscious about the way in which she experimented with narrative style- an aspect of her writing that has had enormous impact on literary history. We can use the terms 'streams of consciousness' or 'interior monologue' or point-of-view slides between the characters with little warning. In *Mrs. Dalloway* the dark picture of patriarchal society is portrayed through the characters' actions

### Review of Literature

*Mrs. Dalloway* has sustained critical predominance in Woolf's canon since its publication in 1925. The British writer and editor, David Lodge (1929) <sup>[12]</sup> puts forward the

view that Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is the novel that communicates the temper of disappointment in general and the feelings of disenchantment in particular. Barret (1986) <sup>[2]</sup> regards that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel about what Virginia Woolf had termed in one of her celebrated essays, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924), "the spirit we live by, life itself". Olson (2009) <sup>[13]</sup> says, "Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays the acute physical and psychic effects, and the sundry ramifications of disenchantment in the post-1918 years (32)." But Sellers (2018) <sup>[14]</sup> thinks that in this novel, readers can feel the irresistible Thanatos of the hero, Septimus, and the heroine, Mrs. Dalloway. Snodgrass (2017) <sup>[15]</sup> praises Woolf's literary style in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is guided by the principal characters' street walking, reveals her ambivalence toward the modern city. Acheson (2016) <sup>[1]</sup> views that, "Virginia Woolf's structure and style reveals a fragmentation of identity that it is a direct effect of the city's rapid modernization, and whose only resolution for Woolf, lies in her characters' inevitable isolation." Edward Bishop (1992) <sup>[4]</sup> comments, "In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the city's tangible reality contrasts with Woolf's disembodied eye, which facilitates the narrative's flow from one identity to the next". Briggs (2006) <sup>[5]</sup> notes, "*Mrs. Dalloway*, different strategy conveys the same dislocating sense of simultaneous absorption in multiple identities, which ends in isolation (9)". The novel's narrator moves fluidly from one character's thought to another's trying together distinct and divergent consciousness by a 'thin bread' reminiscent by a loss of identity, and a 'removal of individuality for anonymity.

Curtis (2002) <sup>[9]</sup> writes, "In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the modern city returns endlessly, repeats itself endlessly in the city, the ghosts are there in advance; the future exists in the past, gives it momentary meaning, through making it present (8)." Dalsimer (2008) opines, "Modernity's rapidly increasingly technological advances, while giving rise to

new conceptions of time, space, speed, mobility and communication, expand the modern city beyond the limitation of coherent perception. The city is no longer comprehensive in its entirety; it has become simply too large and complex. Code (2004) <sup>[7]</sup> observes that Virginia Woolf is now widely accepted as a 'mother' through whom twenty-first century feminists think back, but she was ambivalent towards the suffragette movement.

### Statement of Problem

Through *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf questions why women are not treated as potential intellectual equals and social equals to men. Therefore, the problem of the research paper is how to provide gender equality in political, social and in all aspects of the society.

### Hypothesis

Virginia Woolf uses the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf as a vehicle for criticism of the society to emphasize a new identity for women, departing them from their determined biological sex role to a role representing who they are as individuals.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To support for women's equal legal and political rights with man,
- To identify and remedy the sources of all kinds of operations and subordinations.

### Research Method

The paper takes secondary data source as its research method. It takes feminist ideas, ways of thinking, attitudes and narration presented in *Mrs. Dalloway* relevant to the subject matter of this research. It also studies on the narrative technique, stream of the technique while analyzing the text.

### Discussion

Gender discrimination is the Sex-based discrimination. Simon de Beauvoir (1997) <sup>[3]</sup> explains that sex discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of that person's sex. Sex discrimination also can involve treating someone less favorably because of his or her connection with an organization or group that is generally associated with people of a certain sex.

Rape and sexual assault are considered to be acts of hate. Their relationship to sexism is that Clarissa Dalloway, the protagonist of the novel seems to be discriminated because of her sex. Her husband, Richard Dalloway, is a conservative member in the parliament. Though Clarissa's soul craves for love and to be loved, yet she is the part of that society where women are snubbed and despised. She rejects the marriage proposal of Peter, though she was in love with him, only because she portrayed Peter as a male dictator who dives that he has the right to dictate to her how she should live and what she should do:

For in marriage a little license, 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 (where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared, everything gone into. (12)

The reason behind not marrying Peter was her apprehension

that he would not give her the kind of freedom that she thought essential for her happiness. Richard sees through Clarissa the hypocrisy and insecurity of the society of London. He always scolded her and said sarcastically that she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase. It is all just because Clarissa Dalloway is a woman. She feels such comments are pretty hurtful and often weeps. Consequently, their relationship ends in failure. Clarissa has to mitigate her loneliness through social life and idle gossip and has come to accept that there is a gulf even between husband and wife:

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, and there among the dust of fallen plaster and the litter of birds' nests how distant the view had looked, and the sounds came thin and chill (once on Leith Hill, she remembered), and Richard, Richard! She cried, as a sleeper in the night starts and stretches a hand in the dark for help.

lunching with Lady Bruton it came back to her. He has left me, I am alone forever, she thought folding her hands upon her knee. (52-53)

The kind of relationship which was in between Clarissa and Sally was a reaction against patriarchy and for the creation of a society for women. Sally Seton represented the forbidden in patriarchal society, and her vision was not shared and forbidden in patriarchal society, and her vision was not shared and accepted by the narrow-minded people of the world. Sally Seton was also compelled to yield and accept the patriarchal forces. Both Clarissa and Sally were defeated because the only accepted female identity was the one that was accepted by patriarchy-

Not for herself. She felt only how Sally was being mauled already, maltreated; she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship. (41)

We are also introduced to Miss Kilman who has a grudge against the world. She lost her job as a school teacher when the war came because she was suspected of having German sympathizes. This cruelty of life drove her to seek solace in the church:

Kilman would do anything for the Russians, starve herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she,.....she was in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted with the grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War-poor, embittered, unfortunate creature. (16)

Lady Bradshaw, though she is a classical example of the upper-class Victorian woman, but she obeys her husband and respond fully to his effort to attain power and domination over her. Rezia suffers silently and alone. She has been married to Septimus just because he couldn't stay alone at night. Her husband rejects to have a child because he rejects to join patriarchy by becoming a father himself. Rezia finds herself alone in a foreign country without a husband or a child. She has been compared to a flower without a husband or a child. She has been compared to a flower attempting to protect her battered husband with her maternal petals:

Sitting close, sitting beside him, he thoughts, as if all her petals were about here she was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawyer, who had

reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. (158)

We can see all the female characters suffering and being dominated at the same time just because of being a woman. The law forbids discrimination when it comes to any aspect of employment including hiring, firing, pay, job assignment, promotions, lay off, training, fringe, benefits, and any other term or condition of employment. But as Butler (1999) regards there are no laws inside the society, and among the society persons. Gender discrimination is the burning problem on the equality among male and female.

Additionally, victims almost always are chosen for what they are rather than who they are. A woman is most likely being attacked because of her gender, not who she is as a person.

Woolf portrays the impact of the patriarchal society of England on women's lives in *Mrs. Dalloway*. She portrays the loneliness and frustration of women's lives that has been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional factors. Clarissa, a middle-aged woman, over fifty, holds the centre of the stage, and her experiences of love are part of every warp and woof of the novel. There is her love-story with Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway and Sally Seton. The relationship between Clarissa and Peter starts with love, but it has been marked with a sense of tension. Clarissa's soul craves for love and to be loved, but also wants privacy and independence of her own. Clarissa equates virginity with freedom as a result of an aggressive social structure where women were snubbed and despised. Clarissa portrays Peter as a male dictator who dives that he has the right to dictate to her how she was her apprehension that he would not give her the kind of freedom that she thought essential for her happiness-For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house.

(*Mrs. Dalloway*, 11)

On the other hand, Peter thought that she was cold and lacked female sympathy. Peter is unconventional society of London and is able to see the worldliness, hypocrisy, and insecurity of his society. In his youth, he aspired to be a brilliant poet. He was deeply interested in the affairs of the world-It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally and the defects of her own soul. (11)

She compensates her need of warmth by giving parties and seeking warmth that other people offer. Clarissa vacillates between her need of love and her need of independence. She lacks depth of feelings and understanding, and can't see the inward troubled soul of society. She only sees the world's glittering body, but she knows nothing about social problems:

Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now. Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on. (12-13)

At the same time, Richard Dalloway, Clarissa's husband, sees through Clarissa the hypocrisy and insecurity of the society of London. Throughout Virginia Woolf's presentation of Clarissa-Richard marital relationship, she emphasizes that marriage is not a guarantee of a happy relationship and mutual understanding between a husband and a wife in patriarchal society, over while living under the

same roof. In Clarissa's decision of rejecting Peter and marrying Richard, she chose privacy over passion. Clarissa tries to feel convinced that she acted wisely in rejecting Peter, but the virtues she attributes to Richard as a husband are obviously representing pathetic attempt to view her married life as a total success-So she would still find herself arguing. still making out that she had been right- and she had too- not to marry him she was convinced; though she had borne about her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish. (12)

Clarissa broke the authorial patriarchal voice of uniting with women results in equal relationship. This kind of relationship was a reaction against patriarchy and for the creation of a society for women. Sally was Clarissa's inspiration to think beyond the walls of Burton, read and philosophize.

There they sat, hour after hour, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property. (38).

Woolf describes Clarissa-Sally relationship as a gift. Sally Seton represented the forbidden in patriarchal society, and her vision was not shared and accepted by the narrow-minded people of the world. People like Sally aren't welcomed by society, and they are compelled to conform and resign. Her acceptance of the social roles and constraints of respectability prevented her from following her union with Sally. Both Clarissa and Sally were defeated because the only accepted female identity was the one that was accepted by patriarchy-Not for herself. She felt only how Sally was being mauled already, maltreated; she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship. (41)

While religion teaches love, it could not fulfill its purpose of anchorage. Miss Kilman felt that she would have triumphed on this grim reality only by humiliating Clarissa. In humiliating Clarissa, she wants to humiliate the cruel world that knows nothing about her suffering and poverty. Miss Kilman hates Clarissa because she views her as a product of the patriarchal society by which she was victimized. Miss Kilman's grudge against Clarissa is expressed effectively in the novel in the following words: If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying. (134)

This thought makes her repress her femininity by dressing like men, behaving with ruthlessness and adopting aggressive masculine values. She felt that she had been cheated, and wanted to have revenge against the whole world.

An example of the unconventional woman is portrayed through the character of Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth has to choose between participating in the trivial feminine society of her mother or taking part in the male dominated society of her father. None of those choices is adequate example for the creation of a modern woman. But blending the emotional side of Clarissa with the ambition of the professional life of Miss Kilman gives a promise for the birth of a new identity for women. Clarissa's helplessness as a mother is expressed in the novel: With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa learnt over the banisters and cried out, 'Remember the party! Remember our party

tonight!' But Elizabeth had already opened the front door; there was a van passing; she did not answer. (136)

Lady Bruton is an aristocratic woman and a representative of patriarchy. She is proud of her ancient decent social status and style of living. She has an ambition to solve social and political problems-Lady Bruton had the reputation of being more interested in politics than people; of talking like a man; of having a finger in some notorious intrigue of the eighties, which was now beginning to be mentioned in memoirs. (114)

Lady Bradshaw is a classical example of the upper-class Victorian women. She obeys her husband and responds fully to his effort to attain power and domination over her. She keeps herself busy in the trivial life of attending dinner parties.

Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, waterlogged, of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth or urbane. (109)

Woolf compares Rezia to a flower attempting to protect her battered husband with her maternal petals. Septimus married her without loving her because he couldn't stay alone at night. Rezia suffers silently and alone. Her husband rejects to have a child because he rejects to join patriarchy, by becoming a father himself. Rezia finds herself alone in a foreign country without a husband or a child:

She was very lonely; she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing. His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, he descended another step into the pit. (98)

After the death of Septimus Warren Smith, Rezia is driven to darkness and destruction.

### Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, is widely considered one of the most important works of twentieth century. With this ambitious novel, Woolf established herself as one of the leading writers of modernism. The novel develops innovative literary techniques to reveal women's experience and to prove an alternative to male dominated views of reality. However, the novel is a meditation on time and how humans reckon with its relentless passage. The novel is defined by subjectivity. It focuses on the subjectivity of reality, experience and time. The novel also represents the interweaving of various perspectives and individual trends of thoughts that, strung together, constitute a cohesive whole. This feeling of freedom guides character's initial reactions to the city, and Woolf's stream of consciousness narrative style merges characters' identities into both each other and passing London crowds. In her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf calls women to express themselves in all professions open to humanity. She also calls women not to allow men to talk about their experiences, but they should talk about themselves. She calls for a world of existentialism. She calls for a society of women as an alternative to authoritarian structures. In her call, she bids women to believe in themselves, to maintain integrity of their values and exclude from society all

masculine values of hierarchy, dominance and power. She portrays different status and provides them with a female tradition to rely on. As Code (2004)<sup>[7]</sup> marks, she strives to provide women with proper clues for having a meaning of life.

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