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Mrs Dalloway: A Modernist Masterpiece

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Abstract: As a modernist masterpiece, *Mrs Dalloway* is a reaction against the 'materialistic' fiction of the preceding generation of Edwardians: Galsworthy, Bennett and Wells. It takes down the scaffolding of the traditional male-dominated novel with story, plot, narrative structure that is linear in time and depends on external events. The novel is a critique of Patriarchy, War, Empire and colonization; a transaction between the public world symbolized by Big Ben and St. Margaret's time or Bergsonian time of memory, intuition and 'mind time', the psychological and spiritual dimensions of life. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf carves out the woman's sentence and becomes an innovator par excellence.

Keywords - stream-of-consciousness, psychoanalysis, Bergson, London city, World War, modernist, innovator.

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern novel presents modern consciousness in modern idiom and mirrors its times. From the time of its inception, the novel has responded more quickly and fully to new ideas than other literary genres. Accordingly, the 20th century Novel, following the rapid introduction of new ideas in psychology, natural sciences and sociology has reacted boldly to absorb and transform this material into literary communication. One such new note in modern fiction is the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique.

II. DISCUSSION

1. Stream-of-Consciousness Technique

Between 1913-1915 was born the modern stream-of-consciousness novel, also called the psychological novel, the novel of the silent, the internal monologue. The changed perspective of the modern age was stated dramatically by Virginia Woolf, in her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*: "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (CE I, p.334). In December 1910 was held the **first exhibition of Post Impressionist paintings** in London. The works of Cezanne, Van Gough, Picasso and Matisse declared that the painter was not a mere photographer, but an artist reflecting inner experience. This 'turning inwards' of thought was reflected in the writings of the American philosopher William James, the French philosopher Henri Bergson, and Freud and Jung on the scientific level.

William James coined the term 'stream-of-consciousness' to describe the flux of the mind, its continuity and yet its continuous change. In *Principles of Psychology* 1890 he wrote: "consciousness is an amalgam of all that we have experienced and continue to experience". Consciousness flows like a stream of thoughts and moreover "experience is remoulding us every moment".

Henri Bergson's concept of 'la durée' or **durational or psychological time** laid stress on a time in which clock-time is artificial whereas mental time or mind-time is natural. Bergson stressed on memory and intuition and spoke of life as a flux and that Reality could not be apprehended by the rational intellect alone. In the Bergsonian world, time is heterogenous, always in motion, fluid, ever-shifting and past and

present intermingle and things in it are indistinguishable. Bergson's philosophy helped to break the hold of empiricism of science which was the base of the 'naturalists' and 'materialists'.

Freud laid the foundations of Psychoanalysis and he and Jung had lectured together in the USA in 1909. (Freud's writings began to appear in English translations shortly after 1910). Freud and Jung considered the unconscious as the mainspring of all human actions and motives. We come in contact with it in dreams and day-time reveries. The unseen reality is apprehended by the consciousness. After Freud and Jung, man's personality was seen as having a multiplicity of aspects. Freud also stressed on the free association of ideas, ('psycho-analysis': a term coined in 1896). He stressed on the unconscious and how past events shaped the psyche. This resulted in a view that Reality only exists in subjective apprehensions and it became widespread in artistic circles. Hence for Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Proust, the self was not a fixed and stable entity, but evolving, fluid, discontinuous and fragmented.

All the ideas discussed above helped to define a modern theory of the novel and provide part of the base beneath the dazzling technical experimentation. This new perspective needed a new technique and thus was born the modern stream- of-consciousness novel.

On the eve of the First World War, three novelists were simultaneously working on the stream-of-consciousness technique novel-- **Marcel Proust** in France writing *Remembrance of Things Past*; **Dorothy Richardson** in England writing *Pilgrimage*; **James Joyce** an Irishman writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. They were all autobiographical and written in poetic prose and were voyages into the consciousness. Proust dwell on his past and this helps him to understand himself. Joyce wanted to catch the present moment of perception. The psychic involution, the delving into consciousness leads to vision, the meaning behind appearances. This moment of perception was an "epiphany" according to Joyce and he used a religious term for the artist's vision. By epiphany he meant "a sudden spiritual manifestation " and it was for the artist to delve in and illuminate the mystery of consciousness.

Virginia Woolf declared: **"I want to write a novel about silence, the things people don't say"** (*The Voyage Out*, p.220). In writing the stream-of-consciousness novel she makes silence speak by giving voice to the complex inner world of feeling, thought and memory and establishing this world's claim on Reality. In her famous essay '**Modern Fiction**' (1919), she formulates the theory of stream-of-consciousness: "the mind receives a myriad impressions---trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel". The mind constantly receives "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" of experience which are continually remoulding the personality and it is the task of the novelist to express this "unknown and uncircumscribed" spirit of man. Woolf rejects the traditional novel with its neat story and plot because **"life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo**, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end". Reacting against the "materialists" --- Galsworthy, Bennett and Wells, she writes that in their tight airless plots, life refuses to live. They "write of unimportant things" and "are concerned not with the spirit but with the body". They write of "our daily life in time" whereas **she explores the consciousness and gives us the "poetry of existence"** (*Mod.Fiction*, p.149-150).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, the flux of the mind is dramatically represented as the novel opens 'in media res' or in the middle of things: "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...". Thus, we enter into the world of the mind.

The stream-of-consciousness novel gives us '**mind time**' rather than the traditional 'clock and calendar' time. The novelist in attempting to reveal the discontinuity of the mind uses discontinuity in the novel: a series of free association of ideas which follow in random, not logical order. The novelist presents experience through the techniques of 'flashback' and 'montage' where there is a simultaneous representation of associated images or scenes. Time past, present, future intermingle to form one time or 'mind time'. Memory, by introducing the past into the present and retrospect and anticipation blur time distinctions. In her novel *Between the Acts* Woolf writes: "it took her five seconds in actual time, in mind time ever so much longer".

Story and Plot disappear. Mrs Dalloway opens with Clarissa Dalloway preparing for her party in the evening. During the day she goes shopping on the streets of London, she remembers Peter Walsh whom she loved thirty years ago, she mends her dress, she worries about her daughter, Elizabeth, being enamoured

by a religious fanatic; Peter Walsh comes back to London, they meet, old memories are recalled. During the day we are also witness to the agonized tensions of Septimus Warren Smith and his Italian wife Lucrezia/Rezia. Septimus had served in the First World War and is now suffering from shell-shock. Rezia who is very worried, as Septimus had threatened suicide, takes him to a psychoanalyst who prescribes a long rest in a sanatorium. In the afternoon, Septimus commits suicide by jumping out of the window.

Yet a very different impression remains with us as we close the novel. The novelist does not use the device of 'telling'; rather **the device of 'showing'** lets us know these events as they happen through the dramatic occurrence of thoughts in the stream-of-consciousness process. There is **no character description** of Mrs Dalloway. Her description occurs in the thought process of her neighbour Scope Purvis, who sees her crossing the road: "a charming woman, Scope Purvis thought her...a touch of the bird about her.... light, vivacious....over fifty, and grown very white since her illness...". Clarissa Dalloway thinks of herself as a "diver" trying to recover meaning from the flux of life. Since experience is never limited and never completed, the stream -of-consciousness novelists present **character as a process**, not a finished state and they give us character in depth, not length. Character description is poetic---Mrs Dalloway has the elusiveness of a "mermaid"--- because the material of any one consciousness is an enigma to the other.

We inhabit the dense atmosphere of the mind as it moves backwards and forwards in time; there are **no chapter divisions** and the confusion of time heightens our sense of the depths of mental experience. Yet all is not chaos though the novel represents the natural chaos of our complicated selves. **There are linear properties**, certain organizational principles----- everything happens within 24 hours on a Wednesday, middle of June, in London, in 1923. The clock strikes every half hour and these are like chapter divisions, for ex. Clarissa thinks of Peter Walsh and how he used to clutch his pocket knife when stressed. Just then the clock strikes and a moment later we are with Peter Walsh who clutches his knife hard and thinks that he is going to confess to Clarissa that he still loves her, and the narrative moves forward in this manner.

The technique of **Symbolism** also knits up the stream-of-consciousness of various characters, for example, the window symbol. The window in Virginia Woolf's novels is always open and uncurtained and symbolizes contact with the Beyond. Clarissa often goes to the window for solace; Septimus throws himself out of the window believing that death would unite him with the Beyond.

Another device which organizes the various experiences of people, is when a particular incident is viewed by different people at different places in London city, ex., **the incident of the motor car and of the aeroplane**. An aeroplane describes letters upon the sky. One character merely reads the name of the product advertised, another character thinks of the aeroplane as an "aspiration.... a symbol....of man's soul; of his determination....to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought" (MD, p.23).

Virginia Woolf explores the sea of consciousness and is in search of the meaning of life. Life is a flux and she seeks "**making of the moment something permanent**". James Joyce too seeks the moment of "**epiphany**" or "**a sudden spiritual manifestation**". Woolf defines this as "**the secret deposit of exquisite moments**" which Clarissa Dalloway feels. Withdrawing from the world Clarissa has this moment of intuitive perception when the universe seems to have harmony, beauty and meaning. This experience fills her with so much joy that she wants to share it with her husband Richard, with servants, dogs and canaries even. This gives her an inner well-being and courage to deal with life triumphantly (MD, p.24).

Though the stream-of consciousness novel is autobiographical to some extent, it is both subjective---dealing with self and yet objective--- it gives **the "mind's conversation with life" and "the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude"** as Virginia Woolf writes in *Collected Essays*, II, (p.225).

2. Anti-Canonical and Feminist Perspective

Mrs Dalloway offers an anti-canonical and a feminine perspective. It presents a critique of Empire, War and Patriarchal power- centres. The strident sound and loud boom of Big Ben "shredding and slicing" through the continuum of life. Its imperious clang described as "irrevocable", "indifferent", "inconsiderate", intrudes on the flux of Clarissa's mind, warning her not to transgress the limits of Victorian domesticity. The **Big Ben** symbolizes technology and its history is associated with the masculine public world of capitalist enterprise, of war and dominance, and is the very embodiment of patriarchy, and is both assertive and restrictive (MD, p.4,39). It upholds patriarchal authority which rules time. In contrast is **St. Margaret's**

clock which “is reluctant to inflict its individuality” on others. Its gentle chimes “glides through the recesses of the heart” and is “like a hostess” showing “concern” for her guests, empathising with them. In contrast to the “leaden circles” of Big Ben, St. Margaret’s is “like something which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest---like Clarissa herself” (MD, p. 40-41). St. Margaret’s clock symbolizes women’s time, which is a time of memory and woman- space, the private world of feelings and sensibilities, of ‘mind time’ versus the public world of business and ‘clock and calendar’ time. Septimus’ madness and suicide demonstrate, (more than the death of Jacob Flanders of *Jacob’s Room*), both the ferocity and the fragility of the patriarchal enterprise. His sanity has been sacrificed to the social order that the Prime-Minister represents and yet this power-figure is an unimpressive patriarch: “he looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits...He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him” (MD, p.138). The focus of Clarissa’s party is not the Prime-Minister or the powerful people of England, but the private world of Clarissa and Septimus. Thus, Virginia Woolf undermines patriarchy and masculine power-centres.

Woolf subverts the authority figure in the incident of the car and the aeroplane. When the Royal car suddenly comes to a halt on a London street, the crowd of passers-by begins to speculate about the occupant of the car---whether it is the Queen, or the Prince or some other dignitary travelling. But the author leaves the identity of the figure in the car unknown, and the authority figure is left without voice and identity: “the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time...the face in the motor car will then be known” (MD, p.14). This irony in the narrator’s voice adds an element of mockery and undercuts the bystander’s awe for this representative of Empire. Since the omniscient narrator has no knowledge about the person in the car, the private thoughts of the onlookers have equal weight. The incident of the car is a clever narrative strategy to introduce new characters, especially Septimus the alter ego of Clarissa; the point of view of marginalized figures becomes more important as the narrator surrenders the narrative to bystanders. A present event creates ripples of conscious reverie and the narrative moves forward by these means.

Woolf undercuts the authority figure further by introducing the aeroplane. This immediately takes attention away from the Royal car, yet this incident represents uncertainty and requires interpretation by the onlookers. The letters inscribed by the plane, are like the car, “on a mission of the greatest importance” but similarly it “would never be revealed” and again the narrator does not know what the plane is writing in the sky. New characters are introduced---Maisie Johnson, Mrs Dempster, Mr Bentley—all of whom have their own reactions and narrative. All have to look up to the sky and the aeroplane has ‘egalitarian’ height that dissolves bonds and flattens hierarchies represented by the Royal car. The plane also represents human aspirations towards something beyond ordinary life that can be achieved by means of “man’s soul” or “thought” (MD, p.17,23).

Virginia Woolf’s narrator is anti-authoritarian. She undercuts any authoritative or ultimate viewpoint by leaving the centre unwritten as in the incident of the car, the aeroplane, the Prime-Minister at the party: she lets her characters write their own narratives, and marginalized voices get their say. She saw the task of the modern woman novelist as subversive, to decentre the dominant male voice in fiction and to carve out the feminine sentence and voice. **She was highly suspicious of what she called the ‘scaffolding’ of a traditional novel, that is story, plot, and a narrative structure that is linear** in time and depends on external events. She did not desire the dominating voice of Joyce’s omniscient narrator or the intensely private voice of his interior monologue---but rather a negotiation between the two, the public and the private world. With enormous skill Virginia Woolf varies, modulates, divides and joins the narrative voices in her fiction. According to Anna Snaith, Woolf’s technique is more innovative than that of other contemporary ‘stream-of-consciousness’ writers and that it looks forward to Postmodernism with its continual shifting and sharing of voice.

Woolf captures the elusiveness of both identity and of language—“it is no use trying to sum people up”, she writes in *Jacob’s Room*. She rejects definition as the naming of the self is the dictat of patriarchy which insists on clear-cut differences. She sets up gender ambiguity in *Mrs Dalloway*. Septimus, Clarissa and Doris Kilman have sexual ambiguity which decentres established power. Clarissa and Sally create a woman space-- their’s is a subversive togetherness but marriage breaks up their bond and prevents them from uniting in a “republic of women”. Yet her relationship with Sally was a “revelation” and had a

“religious feeling” (MD, p.111,29). According to Toril Moi, Virginia Woolf anticipates Julia Kristeva and challenges the very notion of identity, calling for a deconstruction of the male-female binary.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf explores the psychology of gendered identities and she writes: “there are two sexes in the mind, one male, one female....the normal comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating...it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly...(this) marriage of opposites (leads to) perfect fulness”. Great poets like Shakespeare and Coleridge had androgynous minds, The “fully developed mind...does not think specially or separately of sex” (AROO, p.92-94) What form gender identity will take in the future is as yet unimaginable as she amply demonstrates in *Orlando*. In the meantime, sexual stereotypes prevent self-expression and true fulfilment and present a tragic dilemma as with Septimus and Rezia. When this highly decorated war hero suffers hallucinations, feels suicidal and is critical of the patriarchal enterprise and speaks of “universal love” as becoming the guiding principle of human life, Rezia thinks he is no longer a man. Such rigid definitions prevent self-fulfilment. In *Three Guineas* Virginia Woolf envisages a “new culture, new history, new self” and freed from the baggage of gender labels, “men and women working together for the same cause” (3 G, pp117).

3. Clarissa---Patriarchy's Perfect Hostess

Septimus rejects patriarchal law and masculine discourse and is marginalized into madness and suicide, but Clarissa becomes patriarchy's perfect hostess though she and Sally were “in league together”. Big Ben subjugates the most recalcitrant subjects to the social order. Sally the rebel marries a business man, becomes ‘Lady Rosseter’ and boasts that she has five boys. Clarissa's relationship with Big Ben is both collusive and subversive. She is subdued and marginalized by patriarchy and there are problematics of Identity---“this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway” (MD, p.9). Though she has social status, a dependable husband, a grown-up daughter, Elizabeth, yet “she could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated”. This existential anguish “an emptiness about the heart of things” is overcome in the persona of “the perfect hostess” (MD, p. 25,26,6). This anguish is successfully overcome by Clarissa's creative urge to fill the void with meaning and become an artist of life. She becomes the perfect hostess whose great moral strength comes from the well-spring of intuition. Clarissa lost faith in God after her sister Sylvia's tragic death and yet she evolved a philosophy ---“this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness” (MD, p.63). She is both in time and is able to transcend time in the “moments of being” she experiences. Clarissa is pictured as a mermaid, a diver who is able to plumb the depths of consciousness and extract the “pearl” of joy. When distracted she goes to the window to seek solace from the Beyond. Like a nun withdrawing from the outside world, she ‘looks within’. Rising above the inhibiting jealousies, vanities and suspicions she felt odd affinities with people she had never spoken to, even with trees or barns. In these moments of heightened spiritual perception, she arrives at a platform of stability and perceives beauty and harmony, a completeness. This moment of vision fills her with joy and from “this secret deposit of exquisite moments” she feels how “one must repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it...” (MD, p.24). Woolf was greatly influenced by Bergson's view of life as a spiritual force, equal to pure time as distinct from chronological time, a vital impetus of the human consciousness and not measurable by chronological time or space. Reality cannot be apprehended by the rational intellect alone. Freud and Jung considered the unconscious as the main spring of all human action and able to apprehend the unseen reality. Thus, Clarissa bows to patriarchal time of Big Ben but also embraces St. Margaret's time---psychological or ‘mind time’ and feminine intuition. She successfully negotiates between clock and calendar time of Big Ben and the ‘la durée’ or durational time of Bergson as symbolized by the softer chimes of St. Margaret.

Clarissa's parties may seem to be frivolous affairs in Peter's view, but to her they are a sacred offering to life. The emptiness, the spiritual bankruptcy of patriarchal discourse---“why always take, never give”, the loneliness and isolation of the modern world can be overcome by a creative effort of getting people together at her parties and by other efforts to make life's “dungeon” as “decent” as possible. Her parties make her an artist of life and were in her view, “an offering; to combine, to create.” This creative effort gives her life meaning and joy and she is able to resist totalizing narrators and narratives. She emerges triumphant and is able to empathize with others, to cultivate the humane qualities of generosity and kindness towards others

and practise “the art of living”. Her existential anguish and social brilliance are contained in the persona of “the perfect hostess” (MD,p.135,63,99,45,6).

4. Septimus

Septimus rejects masculine discourse and ego and spiritual bankruptcy and though in a moment of vision he realizes “universal love” as the panacea---yet he is unable to negotiate the two worlds; he escapes the tyranny of time by committing suicide. Clarissa’s life too is one of continual dispersion and reassembly yet her transcendental experience provides her the inspiration and courage and she collects her fragmented self into “one centre, one diamond, one woman” (or ‘thetic’ subject of Julia Kristeva) and becomes a successful social being (MD, p. 55,30).

Septimus flings himself out of the window struck by the terror of the patriarchal gods of ‘Proportion’ and ‘Conversion’ as symbolized by the doctors---Sir William Bradshaw and Holmes. Feeling the spiritual barrenness of the dominant discourse, he refuses to have children, and is in search of the mother. The voice of the old battered woman at the tube station sings of “love” which will endure till the end of the Earth. This emotional song seems to issue from “a mere hole in the earth”. It is, **the voice of the mother, the unconscious, the unrepresentable, the ‘other’, the repressed forces of life.** The old woman symbolizes the primeval mother, Ceres, who represents immortality, creativity and fecundity (MDp.65-66). Rezia perceives enormous power in this female voice which drowns masculine discourse and floods the hierarchical space of London. Her troubles seem to vanish when she hears this song; it fills her with hope that all would soon be well with her husband, Septimus. However, Septimus commits suicide as he is sick of the inhumanity and brutality of war and the world. He jumps from the window because “death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate...there was an embrace in death” (MD,p.148). In psychoanalytical terms, the ‘embrace’ is an embrace with the Mother. It is this embrace which Clarissa seems to experience for a moment with women: ‘jouissance’.

If Septimus does ‘embrace’ the Mother, then Clarissa “felt somehow very like him” and when she ‘understands’ Septimus’ suicide she momentarily assumes the guise of the archetypal bereaved mother grieving for her son. **The dirge (song of lament) from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* :“ fear no more the heat o’ the sun...”, runs like a chant through the text, repeated often by Clarissa and also finally by Septimus.** In that play two children sing this dirge over the grave of their mother. This grieving for the mother symbolically suggests how Septimus is Clarissa's foil, her artistic double, her alter-ego. To Septimus, death is an escape from personality and from the egotism of the world. Clarissa too had desired death earlier in the novel but her ability to transcend time in the ‘moments of being ’ gives her courage to face the complexities of life and emerge triumphant. Death is not an answer to the problems of life. Clarissa finds courage, draws inspiration from the old lady at the window in the opposite house. This old lady is a mirror image of Clarissa in her attic, a symbol of both independence and isolation and “the privacy of the soul”, the imperishable existence of the soul which escapes the social world (MD, p.103). Clarissa too discards social pretensions in her attic room, sheds her ego and discovers the meaning of self. Yet one cannot go on living with the self in abeyance. Clarissa “assembles that diamond shape, the single person” and becomes “the perfect hostess” as she is able to combine the inner and outer world successfully.

5. Peter Walsh

The figures of the bereaved mother and absent son also haunt Peter Walsh's dream. Sitting in Regent's Park, Peter falls into sleep and dreams of the “solitary traveller” who is in search of “the figure of the mother ” and when does so, the fever and fret of life seem to vanish. The Self experiences “complete annihilation” and the mother figure showers “charity, comprehension, absolution”(MD, p.46-47). Carolyn G. Heilbrun writes that James Joyce, the great practitioner of the stream of consciousness novel was in “search for the father” whereas Virginia Woolf was in “search for the mother”, the ‘other’, the unconscious and hidden spring of vital power, and this is what makes her subversive and innovative.

6. Septimus and Clarissa are twin aspects of a single soul

Both have had traumatic childhoods and now suffer marginalization, are subject to “dominators and tyrants” like Peter Walsh, Miss Kilman, Millicent Bruton, the doctors Holmes and Bradshaw, the War itself. Bird-like imagery typifies them both; they have the same type of curtains and screens at their home with images of birds and Nature and feel the soothing presence of Nature. ‘Bird’ is a symbol associated with mystical experiences and both have important perceptions about the nature of life. **The dirge from *Cymbeline* : “fear no more the heat o’ the sun” links these twin souls** with its association to tragic grieving caused by War and Septimus pictures himself as a drowned sailor who succumbs to depression and helplessness and commits suicide. At other times when this sad melody recurs, it is suggestive that there need not be ‘fear’ as Nature has regenerative powers...the beauty of the clouds, the swaying trees, the sparrow chirping in Greek to Septimus, the birds of paradise on his screen...seem to soothe and calm him. In the simile of the body lying on the beach, Clarissa too finds regenerative powers of the “sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall” (MD, p.32).

Although the dirge shows up similarities between the two, Septimus is the “drowned sailor” whereas Clarissa is the “mermaid” with an amphibious existence which is able to successfully live in the material world and delve into the spiritual depths. She is able to make her life meaningful with her desire to unite people in harmony and understanding and make “her drawing room.....a meeting point, a radiancy.....a refuge for the lonely to come to,...she had helped young people, who were grateful to her” by her balanced demeanour and rising above negativities like “faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions” (MD, p.56,140,30-31).

The novel studies sanity and insanity and suicidal impulses. Septimus and Clarissa urge towards creativity, meaning and beauty in a terrifying and disturbing world. They are oppressed by the tyrants and dominators-- all of whom are too materialistic and fanatical and distrust pity and intuition or are too possessive and are destroyers of the privacy of the soul. Initially, Clarissa was to commit suicide but as the novel progressed, Woolf envisaged it otherwise. Subverting the patriarchal novel, the ‘hero’ is put to death and the ‘heroine’ emerges triumphant.

7. As is typical of modern novels, *Mrs Dalloway* also has an open ending. (ref my article on *The Modernist Novel: An Overview*). The novel has ‘rhythm’ in the more difficult sense of an opening out: Peter Walsh stands in awe of “Clarissa...there she was”. The novel begins with “Mrs Dalloway” navigating her way on the streets of London and through the complexities of life, to a triumphant assertion of herself as “Clarissa”. Clarissa is praised by Sally as “generous” and “pure-hearted”; by Peter too, who is in awe of “her indomitable vitality...there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of” (MD, p.154,125).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf carves out the innovative feminine sentence and vision, manifested in the look of the female vagrant on the streets of London looking “to observe curiously, to speculate boldly, to consider the whys and the wherefores....”(MD, p.94).

8. As a City Novel

Raymond Williams in ‘Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism’ delineates decisive links between the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the modern metropolis. **The experimental trait in Modernism “was an art of cities”,** writes Malcolm Bradbury. The urban experience is central to the narrative and the “city comes to the foreground to make it a primary character, a complex living being”, writes Peter Childs, as for ex. Joyce’s Dublin, Alfred Doblin’s Berlin, Kafka’s Prague, Robert Musil’s Vienna, Langston Hughes’ New York. The city is important to Modernism for the challenges and opportunities it offers, its crowds, consumerism, technology, architecture its fast-paced life ---all these provided a range of experiences and stimuli which transformed modern writing by placing demands on the modes of representation.

Charles Baudelaire describes the modern man as a ‘flaneur’ (one who saunters/ casually walks around observing society), an urban dweller and mover soaking-in the experience of “the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite”. The city itself provides new narratives and possibilities for perception and creation, offers a multiplicity of views and voices simultaneously. Raymond Williams explains how the city is crowded, alienating, isolating; there are ‘dark’ places of crime- prone areas, squalor, poverty, yet

solidarity of workers and marginalized groups, a Bohemian freedom, and also creative impulses of immigrants to the city. The city with its labyrinth of streets, flux, movement and change poses a challenge to modern artists and stimulates radical innovations in matters of representation of this complex milieu. **The city becomes an opportunity to examine central Modernist concerns of consciousness, perspective and Time**--- famous ex. are *Mrs Dalloway*, and Joyce's gritty, realistic and also mythic mapping of Dublin in *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce described Dublin as the second city of the British Empire.

Virginia Woolf and London

Virginia Woolf also recorded and dramatized her relationship to London in her diaries. In her novel *Night and Day* she writes of the city as presenting a "spectacle" and "some pageant"; the search- lights of War co-exist with the "natural" moon. Clarissa too loves the "divine vitality" of London and "she loved life; London; this moment of June"; an airplane sky-writing is a mesmerising sight advertising a product; to Peter Walsh, London appears to be "floating off in carnival" as evening falls and the city lights come on (MD, p.4,6,132). In 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1927), Woolf writes of the pleasures of "rambling the streets of London". **Woolf becomes the 'flaneuse' or female stroller** who sees the "bright paraphernalia" of the streets and then periodically withdraws into interior spaces of the self to speculate boldly over the meaning and significance of experiences. After her morning stroll through London Clarissa Dalloway, having bought flowers for her party in the evening, returns home which was "cool as a vault". Withdrawing "like a nun" she felt "blessed and purified" to have an epiphanic experience "this secret deposit of exquisite moments" of heightened perception into the meaning of life.

The city itself becomes a text to be read and interpreted and provides scope for narrative. The shops, with their interesting window display, provide both aesthetics and commercial spaces. There are extremes of wealth and poverty, beauty and ugliness, squalor and magnificent buildings and architecture---the Royal Palace, the Parliament, Big Ben; destitute figures on the streets shock the eye and people out of their complacency. Clarissa walking home to her plush neighbourhood of Westminster, is shocked to see "the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall).....can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament" (MD, p.4).

The anonymous stranger is the most significant figure in representation of modern urban life. **The 'uncanny'** as Walter Benjamin noted, was born out of the rise of the great cities, in which human beings are strangers to each other and to themselves. Homelessness, 'unhomeliness', is, a literal translation of the German word for 'uncanny'. **Freud's essay 'The Uncanny'** (1919) where he states that moments experienced by the individual as strange, as intimating the supernatural, are caused by a recurrence of repressed feelings or images evoked by an encounter. For Freud the uncanny is experienced both as familiar and the unfamiliar, both simultaneously 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich' (homely and strange). It breaches stable boundaries and categorizations. The uncanny has been useful to explain the origin and depth of symbols and experience. Clarissa and Septimus both have 'uncanny' experiences. Septimus has uncanny psychic experience while sitting in Regent's Park--- the smoke clouds of the sky advertisement are a message from the 'Beyond'; Nature seems to be "signalling" to him and "the unseen bade him"; the sparrow chirping in Greek sang "of life beyond a river....how there is no death"; Nature, trees, birds clouds the sky seem to be "bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness" of a positive message about life, of "universal love" and kinship, a message which he feels must be conveyed to the Parliament to enact laws which would further human happiness (MD, p.18-21). Clarissa 'uncannily' connects up with Septimus when she hears of his suicide, and though she has never met him she feels she understands him perfectly. They are twin aspects of the same soul and perceptiveness. Parks, as in her short story 'Kew Gardens' were for Woolf key sites for encounters which are both fleeting and yet psychically invested. Windows in Virginia Woolf are always open and uncurtained, and when troubled her characters go to the window, a means of contact with the 'Beyond', the spiritual force as delineated by Bergson.

III. CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf writes that **she is concerned with "the wider questions which the poet tries to solve...of our destiny and meaning of life"** (*Collected Essays II*, p.225). Her style renders the 'here and now' with concrete realization, while her psychological and philosophical interrogations are couched in the exquisiteness of her poetic-prose---which in her own phrase is like "butterfly powder": newly arrived, modernist and magical.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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