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Structural Patterns of Mrs. Dalloway by Virgina Woolf

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Abstract
The literature of the first half of the twentieth century has come to be known as the "Modernist Literature," which moved in two different and contrary directions. Virginia Woolf began to write fiction around 1915, at a time when James and Conrad had already made departure from the Victorian convention of the novel as social comedy or social tragedy. They had rejected the restrictions of realism to move into the deeper region of reflection. Woolf went a step further to abandon action altogether, rejecting the conventional notion of plot and character, subject and style. She introduces new technique of "Stream of consciousness." Woolf is said to have been indebted to M. Proust, D. Richardson, and H. Bergson. Virginia Woolf, like any other writer, was of her age, in the first place. She shared the restless experimentalism of the modern period in the history of English literature. The drive to make it new, as Pound kept hammering it, can be seen as a sort of compulsion with Woolf; it can be seen as a kind of courage, and artistic stratergy that is anything but soft.

Keywords: metaphors, stream of consciousness, human mind, complexity, sadness, solemn

Introduction

Mrs. Dalloway is not a conventional novel that depicts external reality of incidents and characters woven together into a plot involving those characters in a tragic or comic situation arising out of a logically arranged pattern of incidents. Using the new ideas of Henri Bergson and William James about the simultaneity of time and the associational functioning of the human mind, Virginia Woolf came out with a new novel form where the conventional elements of plot and character, and setting and situation were totally discarded. Her firm belief was that if a writer wanted to depict full reality, it could not be done within the predetermined framework of 'genre' or its subsidiary concepts of plot, character, etc.

Mrs. Dalloway's structure seems largely modelled on the multiple scanned chapters in Ulysses which is held together by the progress of the vice-regal cavalcade through Dublins's streets. There are so many mines in the London streets and these mines reflect the different faces of the city. However, the mind of Mrs. Dalloway and that of Septimus Warren Smith, hold the centre of the book, just as do the mines of Bloom and Dealus in Ulysses. Wood Andelys in the article states, "In Mrs. Dalloway, landmarks of 1920s London offer readers a web of spatial and temporal relationships: the novel's walks are located specifically but also problematically. Attention to Woolf's careful interweaving of time and place leads to fuller understanding of Mrs. Dalloway and of the London in its pages (1)".

However, if Bloom and Dedalus are a pair of father and son who meet for a brief moment at the end of a long day symbolically, as Odysseus (in English Ulysses) met Telemachus after a life time of wanderings, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith seem to be to facets of the same personality - indeed, the projection by Virginia Woolf of two sides of herself. Mrs. Woolf's diary shows that she conceived Mrs. Dalloway as an attempt to show "the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side. "And we know from the novelist's own preface to it that she first intended Septimus to have no existence: it was Clarissa who to die at the end of her London day and her brilliant party. Finally she envisaged Septimus as a "double" of Clarissa.

The novel projects the inner self of Mrs. Dalloway, her thoughts, feelings, memories, frustrations as she is getting ready herself for the evening party which she has arranged at her place. The novel has a scattered story and the characters are also ill-matched and disconnected. The novel has a fragmentary dramatic design, in which the key metaphors are projected and sustained by a continuous web of subtly related minor metaphors and harmonizing imagery. Mrs. Dalloway has properly no beginning or ending. It opens one morning with Clarissa Dalloway in the midst of preparing for a party. The major event of her day is the return of Peter Walsh, the man had almost married instead of Richard Dalloway, a successful member of parliament. Clarissa and Richard have a daughter, Elizabeth, who is temporarily attached to a religious fanatic, a woman with the Dickensian name of Miss. Kilman. There is also in the novel another set of characters who at first seem to have no connection with Clarissa and her world: Septimus Smith, a veteran of the First World War, and his Italian wife, Rezia, a hat maker by trade. Septimus, who is suffering from shall-shock, is being treated- somewhat brutally-by a hearty M.D., Dr. Holmes. During the day of Clarissa's preprations, Septimus visits Sir William Bradshaw, and eminent psychiatrist, who recommends rather too firmly the Septimus should be taken to a sanatorium. In the late afternoon, as Dr. Holmes comes to take him away, Septimus jumps from the balcony of his room and gets killed. That evening, Sir William Bradshaw reports the story of his death in Clarissa's party.

Virginia Woolf's peculiar technique, as exemplified in Mrs. Dalloway as well as other major novels, resides in the fact that the exterior objective reality of the momentary presents which the author directly reports and which appears as established fact is nothing but an occasion. The stress squarely falls on what the occasion releases think which are not seen directly but by reflection, which are not tied to the present of the framing occurrence which releases them. Here, one naturally thinks of Proust's work, where this sort of thing was done for the first time. The entire technique is bound up with a recovery of lost realities in remembrance, a recovery released by some externally insignificant and apparently accidental occurrence. Proust describes the procedure he follows in his narratives more than once. Like Proust, Woolf, too, aims at objectivity; she wants to bring out the essence of events. She strives to achieve this goal by acceptance the guidance of her own consciousness-not, however, of his consciousness as it happens to be at any particular moment but as it remembers things. A consciousness in which remembrance causes past realities to rise, which has long since left present, sees and arranges that content in a way very different from the purely individual and subjective. Freed from its various earlier involvements, consciousness views its own past layers and their content in perspective: it keeps confronting them from their exterior temporal continuity as well as from the narrow meanings they seemed to have when they were bound to a particular present.

The novel is in the form of a conventional narrative. The ebb and flow of the phrasing and the frequent repetition of the same or similar expressions, through which her characteristic rhythmic and metaphorical designs are built up completely, disappear. The words and phrases, images and metaphors and symbols keep recurring, forming pattern and a rhythm, offering a new form of fiction altogether. The repeated word does not occur in a conventional metaphorical expression, and its metaphorical value is felt only after it has been met in number of contexts. Woolf's most characteristic metaphors are purely symbolic.

It can be indicated from the adjective "solemn" how a recurrent expression acquires its special weight of meaning. If we can see how metaphor links with metaphor, we can also get a notion of the interconnectedness of the entire novel. The word "solemn" appears on the very first page of Mrs. Dalloway, "How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen…"(1).

It is then echoed on the very next page, in the first account of Big Ben's striking (an important passage in relation to the whole novel):

> For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? Over twenty, - one feels even in the midst of traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. (2)

The word "solemn," which in its first appearance on the opening page has only a local meaning of "something awful going to happen," is now connected with a more particularized terror, the fare of suspense, of a pause in experience. Each time that "solemn" his repeated in subsequent descriptions of Big Ben, it carries this additional meaning. The word appears three times in the afternoon scene in which Clarissa looks across at an old woman in the next house:

> How extra ordinary it was, strange, yes, touching to see the old lady(they had been neighbours over so many ears) more away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the movement solemn. (113)

In the early morning scene near the end of the book, we see Clarissa going to the window, again seeing the old lady, thinking, "it will be a solemn sky…it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty." In the passage there is some suggestion in the imagery of Big Ben's stroke coming down and marking an interruption in the process of life. By the end of the book we see the significance in the use of "solemn" on the first page in a passage conveying a sharp sense of freshness and youth. The terror symbolized by Big Ben's "pause" has a connection with early life, "…one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end." The "something awful…about to happen" was associated with "the flap of a wave, the kiss of a wave": the "solemnity" of life is a kind of "sea- terror" (so Shakespeare might express it in The Tempest). Wave and water images recur in other "solemn" passages: "the wave," "the leaden circles dissolved in the air." Thus, through a chain of various associations, the word "solemn" acquires symbolic significance in the story of the novel.

Thus, Mrs. Dalloway the novel's meaning is contained in a web of metaphors and symbols with various associated images around them, one leading to another, a cluster gathering into a significance finally related to the psychological state of the central character in the novel. Also, we need to carefully note that in Mrs. Dalloway, the metaphor that links the continuities, (such as "solemn") and give unity to the novel's dramatic design is not a single, easily describable analogy, but two complimentary and extremely complex analogies which are gradually expressed through recurrent words and phrases and through the dramatic pattern of the various sequences. In Mrs. Dalloway, for one, there is an air of vague and hopeless sadness. We never quite get to learn but Clarissa's situation really is. The novel is full of good and genuine love but also, in its feminine way, with irony, amorphous sadness, and doubt of life.

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