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Reverberations of Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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Abstract

Trauma has been represented in many works of Literature and with increased chaos in the world, novelists and poets tend to portray this reality in their works. The theory of psychoanalysis is significant to study the reverberations of trauma in Literature. This research paper will thoroughly analyze the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf so as to bring out the consequences of War on the people. The traumatic suffering depicted in the novel is pathetically diffusing. However, an exploration of trauma is not for the only sake of trauma, but to draw our attention to the external threat of the War, which was inhuman and dreadful.

Keywords: Chaos, Psychoanalysis, Stream of Consciousness, Traumatic, War

Introduction

Literature acts as a medium to connect people through generations. It helps us to explore the behavior, culture and tradition of a particular country which otherwise would not have been possible. Literature enables the authors, to write texts or poems by creating characters or ideas, suggesting different thought processes. It widens the horizon of our knowledge and through it we delve deep into such creations and relate ourselves to it. Mind has a certain realm that wanders and has no limits. Any text of Literature significantly portrays such phenomena of mind. It is mind and heart that together gives rise to certain emotions and that further make a particular work worthy of reading. P.K Nayar in *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* writes:

Today, texts are read for the 'desires' they seem to conceal, the kinds of 'drives' in their characters and the 'unconscious' in them. This critical move to explore the nature of the human psyche by exploring the deeper, hidden meanings of texts and their characters is identifiable as a major critical method today, one that we can define as 'psychoanalytic'. (Nayar, 2010)

'Psychoanalysis' is a term that is applied to medical process in which the mental disorders are cured. For this treatment the conscious and unconscious elements of mind are taken into consideration. Sigmund Freud an Austrian Neurologist is considered to be responsible for the development of 'psychoanalysis', although the discipline is not a new concept as earlier also the classical philosophers have written about psychology. M.A.R. Habib in *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory* writes:

Ever since Aristotle, critics and philosophers have examined the psychological dimensions of Literature, ranging from an author's motivation and intentions to the effect of texts and performances on an audience. The application of psychoanalytical principles to the study of Literature however is a relatively recent phenomenon, initiated primarily by Freud and, in other directions by Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. (Habib, 2013)

Psychoanalysis, conceived out of Freud's thorough effort to clarify his own fantasies, is an all-inclusive instrument for understanding the human mind, and a type of treatment. Freud was likewise a man of culture; in his journey towards areas which he had not initially intended to investigate, and which he really pulled back from investigating, writing and artistic expressions offered him in excess of a field of experimentation, they offered themselves as a language and some help. Freud unreservedly conceded that artists had gone before him in the comprehension of man. Freud's approach of psychoanalysis will be used to study traumatic experiences of the characters in the novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf.

The rapid development of science of psychology had enriched the study of human characters in the novels with the works by Sigmund Freud. *Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1916) and *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1914) opened the way to the exploration of the vast fields of the subconscious and the unconscious, and thus encouraged the novelist's tendency to dwell more and more within the mind of his character. D.H Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf were

among the major writers whose works strongly reflects the influence of modern psychology. As psychoanalysis aims at studying the deeper meaning of the text revealing the conscious and unconscious state of mind of the characters, thereby its principles can also be used to study 'trauma' and its cure.

Trauma might be characterized as a unique inward wound, as an encounter of overabundance which overpowers the subject emblematically and destroys the real identity of human mind. It affects in such a way that one is incapable of living a normal life. It is in literal terms a wound inflicted on the mind due to certain unwanted circumstances. Trauma has been represented in many works of Literature and with increased chaos in this world, novelists and poets tend to portray this reality in their works. The theory of psychoanalysis is significant to study the reverberations of trauma in Literature.

Literature Review

While reviewing Literature it was found that Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman are two writers who have been working on trauma, and Literature. In 1995, Cathy Caruth composed a basic prologue to an assortment of papers named *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* and in 1996 she wrote *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Subsequently, Cathy Caruth has been perceived as a pioneer of injury hypothesis. The historical backdrop of the idea of trauma is loaded up with inconsistent hypotheses and consistent discussions. The two analysts and abstract researchers have worked with differing meanings of trauma and its impact. A large part of the most up to date analysis utilizes psychoanalytic and semiotic speculations that rebuild how we comprehend injury's capacity in Literature. However, this research paper aims at investigating trauma through psychoanalytic approach which is a new concept. It can demonstrate fruitful in the present situation because of the ideas applied to it in concentrating on the issue.

Objective

The objective of the research paper is to analyze Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* to study the reverberations of trauma. It has been observed that the post-nineteenth century is described as a "trauma culture" because the time period has experienced both widespread, collective catastrophes, such as the two world wars and the Holocaust, as well as more insidious forms of trauma due to slavery, imperialism and racism. Thus, witnessing the real-life traumatic incidents, writers have also portrayed the same in their works. Literary scholars have made significant contributions in the quest to better understand the complexities of trauma and its multiplicities.

Significantly the objective of this research paper is to demonstrate the close relationship between psychoanalysis and literature. In particular, for presenting this closeness, trauma as a term has been taken from psychoanalysis and Woolf's novel has been chosen from literature.

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for the research includes close reading, and interpreting the primary source chosen for study. An interdisciplinary approach is used to interpret the texts with the help of the theories of trauma and psychoanalysis. Certain events, characters, behaviors, and emotions has been taken as they occur in the novel and have been analyzed according to the psychoanalytic thought. For this few concepts like subconscious and unconscious, the ego, etc would be taken into consideration.

Study of Trauma in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was one of the greatest literary artists in the 20th century, pioneering the contemporary English literature with the stream-of-consciousness technique. *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is one her famous work that reveals the internal workings of the mind of the protagonist and other characters as well. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf utilizes the characters in the novel to address the various philosophies of British society following World War I. At the focal point of the story, Clarissa Dalloway exemplifies the sensation of the privileged. Clarissa is the epitome of repression and denial; she beautifies her world to hide the ugliness of death and pain underneath. At the opposite side of the spectrum, Septimus Smith is the personification of the collapse of the imperialistic pride and power of England after the war, exuding the pain and suffering that he is unable to keep hidden. Peter Walsh serves as a challenger to Clarissa's aristocratic viewpoint, although he maintains a naive attachment to prewar England. Another more blatant resistance to Clarissa's ideals comes in the form of Miss Tillman, who represents the working class in opposition to the war, and Doctors Holmes and Bradshaw act as emissaries of continuity, staunch supporters of the pre-war Empire.

Clarissa is introduced by Woolf as she wanders the streets of London looking for flowers for her reception that evening. She thinks about all the things she loves as she waits on the curb, "life; London; this moment of June" (Woolf 4). The novel follows the existences of the characters all through one June day, a long time after the conflict has finished. Regardless of the endeavors of these characters to keep up with the presence of progression and conviction, the sign of the injury of the conflict repeats. Through these characters, Woolf uncovers the manner by which British society has lost its pre-war personality, especially its feeling of majestic pride and social prevalence, because of waiting and upsetting signs of war injury that undermine the general public's feeling of steadiness and reason.

It must be found that the novel is generally engaged with the tone of sadness and despairing, which is as per the topical issue of the War subsumed inconspicuously in the account of the characters' otherworldliness. Clarissa's life is unavoidably dependent upon the power of her better half, Richard Dalloway, who with his parliamentary position, empowers the entire family to appreciate both an unrivaled standing just as a solid economy. Notwithstanding, part of Clarissa's self oddballs this yielding constantly, which is perpetually conflated with her solid insubordinate soul underneath. Furthermore, it implies a lopsided

challenge between free uniqueness and the male-overwhelmed society she abides in and exposes a reality that Woolf's women's activist musings motivated by the Feminist freedom of the twentieth century are decorated into Clarissa's considerations wherein her familiarity with female autonomy is seriously solid.

Trauma makes people to feel lonely and alienated. Clarissa in Mrs. Dalloway repeatedly says that "What a lark! What a plunge!" (Woolf, 1996, p. 3) which reflects the inner working of Clarissa's mind who is not at peace. She yearns for freedom but is bound into the relationship and faking smiles at people sophisticatedly. As a survivor of male incomparability, alongside the drastically changed over condition in the post bellum world, she is continually gotten between her feeling of life and demise. "She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very dangerous to live even one day." (Woolf, 1996, p. 6) Moreover, Woolf writes, "she has the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown." (Woolf, 1996, p. 8)

Clarissa's deficiency of self-character can be credited to the disintegrating of her convictions, and it has led to her deserting of confidence in the current age, which she fights loaded with vulnerabilities. Without security and trust, she is spooky by her reluctant uncertainty towards everybody. She peers downward on Miss Kilman as a "brutal monster" (Woolf, 1996, p. 9), and also claims Lady Bruton as "a dial" (Woolf, 1996, p. 23), and considers Peter Walsh an "adventurer" (Woolf, 1996, p. 39).

Her relationship with individuals is awfully managed. Pained by the current life, her psyche follows back to bygone times in Bourton. Indeed, even the recollections are dark under the extreme strain. Torn of boldness of anticipating a confident life, she attempts to pacify her terrifying heart with these Shakespeare's works, murmuring to herself, "Fear no more the heat o' sun, nor the furious winter's rages." (Woolf, 1996, p. 7)

Unequipped for adapting to his injury, Smith takes his life by bouncing off the window. The horrible languishing over Smith is remarkably unbearable. As a veteran, Smith doesn't leave from his recollections of the conflict. All things being equal, the impression of his encounters in the conflict upon his psyche is clear and enthusiastic, for the most part as his horrible dreams, and the picture of his companion Evans. The past torments him so insanely, that his entire being is contacted with repulsive and dismay. Virginia Woolf in the novel thus writes:

Smith Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazed eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes strangers apprehensive too. (Woolf, 1996, p. 21)

The war and its impact have created certain drives in the characters, and their actions analyzed from that point of view. Soldiers coming from the First World War and the Second World War have been reported to have suffered from hallucinations and disillusion, and the trauma of war. Beside this never-ending reminder of ongoing death and destruction that continually haunts the characters as portrayed by Virginia Woolf. They suffer endlessly from the traumatic sense of loss, fear, helplessness, and alienation.

Conclusion:

Female writers today have gained prominence in the literary and intellectual productions. There reflects intense desire for self identity as the weapon of survival strategy for the successful life in the society. It has been observed that psychoanalysis has the greatest theoretical potential and allows for the complexity necessary for a highly developed account of human existence and of the self. Psychoanalytic theory helps to study the insights of the human conditions. The First World War was a catastrophic event, mercilessly striking people into countless wounds and deaths. Despite the ceasing of the War, grief and agony were not promptly dispelled. They kept lingering on the minds for years, until they settle for a perpetual stay in the form of traumatic memories.

This research paper will not only guide us to a better understanding of pervasive impacts of traumatic experiences but will also serve as a reflection of the traumatic narratives of different protagonists. The traumatic suffering depicted in the novel is pathetically diffusing. However, an exploration of trauma is not for the only sake of trauma, but to draw our attention to the external threat of the War, which is inhuman and dreadful. Nowadays, in the world of the 21st century, the potentiality for the eruption of wars has been largely reduced. Yet, owing to the historical lessons taught by the two Great Wars, all the countries in the world should consistently insist on the principle of a peaceful compatibility, so that life of bliss and felicity is ensured for human, and the integration of human's minds can thus be forged into a permanent protection.

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