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The footprints of Sigmund Freud in  
Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

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## ABSTRACT

This Bachelor Thesis provides a closer approach to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* in relation to her psychology and life through the theory of Psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud, and aims to analyse in depth how their different ideologies influenced directly in the way they had of portraying the world and understanding the human mind. In addition, a direct relationship between the two thinkers is established in order to know whether they met and what their thoughts on each other were, taking into account the topics of war, feminism and psychology, which had a great impact in their writings and ideologies.

**KEYWORDS:** Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, the Great War, Psychoanalysis, doctors, Feminism.

En este proyecto de fin de carrera se brinda una visión detallada de la novela de Virginia Woolf *Mrs Dalloway* en relación con su psicología y vida a través de la teoría del Psicoanálisis desarrollada por Sigmund Freud, y tiene como objetivo analizar en profundidad cómo sus distintas ideologías influyeron en el modo que tenían de retratar el mundo y de entender la mente humana. Además, se establece una relación directa entre los dos pensadores para saber si se conocieron y qué opinión tenían el uno del otro, teniendo en cuenta cuestiones como la guerra, el Feminismo y la Psicología, que tuvieron un gran impacto en sus escritos y sus ideologías.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, la Gran Guerra, Psicoanálisis, doctores, Feminismo.



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## Introduction

Virginia Woolf was a feminist, middle-class, self-educated British woman who had to make her way in a man's world in order to be able to make her own decisions and do what she enjoyed the most: writing. Since birth, Woolf had to see how her family nucleus coped with physical and psychological illnesses, and how her abusive brothers were given the opportunity of accessing higher education while she had to stay at home detained to the reading of the books her father had at home. She suffered multiple nervous breakdowns and periods of bed rest which had nothing to do with mental health problems (e.g.: diseases, toothache, etc.) Psychologists could not agree on a particular diagnosis (and still cannot). As a result, she had to stand a constant criticism of her mental health condition and her way of living.

Simultaneously, Sigmund Freud, the forefather of Psychoanalysis, published his first writings on his set of theories, which (although rejected at first by the public eye) gained credibility with time. Although Freud and Woolf did not agree on many subjects, they shared historical context and even agreed on certain topics. After controversial testimonies about each other, they finally met in 1939 and shared a few words, which would mark their lives to a yet uncertain extent.

In this essay I will give an in-depth vision of Woolf's writings and ideology in contrast with that of Sigmund Freud. My exploration of the subject is divided into three chapters. The first one deals with the historical context in which Freud and Woolf lived, which influenced to a great extent their careers and ideologies, and it is focused on the topics of war and the booming of Psychoanalysis as a set of theories. The second chapter deals with the relationship that Woolf had with doctors and Freud with women, and provides information about their meeting in the Maresfield Gardens in 1939.

To finish with, in the third chapter I will analyse Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, one of her most influential works from the perspective of Psychoanalysis, and give an interpretation from the perspective of Freud's theories.





## Contextual Framework

### War and the new situation of women

It is the year 1914, and the Great War has just started. This event did not take anyone by surprise, since the dimension of the conflict was of great magnitude even before it actually took place. It had a great impact on the society of the time, regardless of the role of its individuals on it; both combatants and non-combatants were deeply marked by it. In the sphere of art, and more specifically in literature, the effects were immeasurable, to the point that artists started to focus their attention on the topic of war and, consequently, to make their works revolve around it. The conflict was subject of the criticism of many authors. Among them, we find one of the most prominent figures to write about the topic of war: Virginia Woolf. Whether it was directly or indirectly, her works appear to revolve around this topic, surrounded by a strong criticism.

Woolf believed that war flatly contradicted “a fundamental rule of civilian life: that killing is illegal” (Floyd, 1475). Her nephew, who was the authorised writer of her biography, took account of her dislike for violence. In spite of her anti-war message and her desire to be a simple bystander of the Great War, some scholars argue that she actually gave this subject a prominence in her personal and artistic life that would define both her literary career and her readership’s ideology.

Before the Great War, and as the power of fascism started to rise in Europe (more specifically in Germany), Woolf had a fear that Britain would follow the same path. It threatened many different strands of the English society, which ranged from economy to even women’s rights. Yet, because war was a male-dominated area and only they were allowed to fight actively, most historians refuse to acknowledge her writings on the subject as important, and prefer to focus on narratives whose authors are men. They back this statement on the argument that she was just a spectator during World War I and World War II. Men had to leave home and fight actively for their country. Statistics show that at least 8.7 million men served for the British Army in the Great War at some point of the conflict, taking into account all the colonies and territories ruled by the British Empire . Around 64% of the men who fought returned to

duty after the war ended. Women, therefore, had to take more responsibilities than ever before, but at home. During these years, the modern world was unstable; it swung unsteadily between extreme opposites of peace and war, despair and hope, nihilism and primitivism. These conflicts were the ground on which Woolf wrote her novels, which were based on her life experiences. One such example is the death of her friend Rupert Brook, a member of the Bloomsbury group, who was recruited and died during the war.

An important aspect to take into account is that Woolf's writings are characterised by a constant reference to the different systems and relations of power in which the England of that time was based; from imperialism and capitalism to the patriarchal system that defended the supremacy and the superiority of men over women. For instance, she called patriotism a "base emotion." (Woolf 1915: 5) Her essay "Am I a Snob?" illustrates very clearly her opinion about these relations of power. It is a brief document which she wrote at the culminating moment of her career. During these years, she had her first contact with the "beau monde". Although she had a negative opinion about it, she could not avoid feeling fascinated by the public life, and she reportedly enjoyed "the red carpets" and the people talking. This writing was read at the Memoir Club on December 1, 1936; and states the following: "The snob is a flutter-brained, hare-brained creature so little satisfied with his or her own standing that in order to consolidate it he or she is always flourishing a title or an honour in other people's faces so that they may believe, and help him to believe what he does not really believe—that he or she is somehow a person of importance." (Woolf 1985: 62-67) It is for this reason, for instance, that we can still see nowadays the importance of her writings in the study of many social issues, one of them, women's consciousness of war and the Feminist movement.

The comparison she made between relations of power and, specifically, between patriarchy and fascism is present in her work *Three Guineas*, where she focused the attention on the main character: a woman who is dominated by domestic life, restrictive norms of violence, competition and domination. The main idea behind this questionable conduct is that women should not try to achieve equality and preserve those characteristics that were natural to them and only them. In the case of Imperialism, in order to illustrate the reader on these relations of power, she compares women to land using a metaphor. In both cases, they are considered to be an object that ought to be

possessed by someone who is in a position of power. Woolf uses the term “intricate interrelations” to name a phenomenon that is shared among all these systems of oppressions (racism, sexism, capitalism and, specifically, militarism and imperialism). “[...] the metaphor works in both directions: to corrupt the relation of men to women with possessiveness and to turn England’s relation to its colonies into a kind of substitute for sexual gratification.” (Phillips)

For the simple reason that experience makes up great part of an author’s writings, we find certain ideas around which her novels revolve. She wrote about the love she felt for the society, but on the other, she also felt a total despair caused by the above mentioned conflicts and relations of power. In her novels, she portrays them using symbols of time, transformation and futility of man’s struggle. This, together with the satire with which Woolf wrote about the British society and the Modern world, could be the main reason why her recognition as a cultural commentator has not grown until recent times, as it is explained in J. Phillips book *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*. As Phillips asserts, Woolf uses juxtapositions to condemn two different systems of oppression: on the one hand, Imperialism, the British society and the Modern world in general; on the other, gender relations and the systematic maltreatment that women had to bear in the patriarchal society in which they lived.

Another aspect that was crucial in Woolf’s life, as we will see along this entire dissertation, death was very present in Woolf’s life at an early stage, and it would continue to affect her the rest of her life. The deaths of her mother in 1895, her half-sister Stella in 1905, her father in 1905 and her brother Thoby one year later would sink her in the depths of a dark depression. In contrast to the trauma that her past personal deaths had caused her, the deaths she would suffer later during the Great War would leave Woolf in a state of denial, as it is reflected in her diaries. The government’s propaganda and the proclaimed patriotism that the newspapers encouraged gave the English population a feeling of security, of civilian immunity, and Woolf was not an exception. In her diary, she wrote that “it always seems utterly impossible that one should be hurt” (*Diary I*: 32). During the war years, she started to progressively see that this immunity was not a “reality”, as she called war, but rather an illusion. In her short story *A Society* (1921) she illustrates the lack of war’s reality to civilians, for instance, when the women in the story say: “What war? ...What war?” (127). Therefore, we can

see how she constantly reflects in her writings a sense of civilian incomprehension of the war and a constant contradiction between security and death.

War also affected Woolf's love life. After having graduated from Cambridge University in 1904, her husband himself served for over seven years in what was known in the early 20th century as Ceylon, nowadays named Sri Lanka, at the Ceylon Civil Service. During these years, he wrote a detailed diary, in which he reflected on the most important issues dealing with, among others, colonialism. It was during his stay that he adopted the liberal political point of view that he would later share with Virginia Stephen, her future wife. Because during his stay he had to process administrative issues, and was in close contact with the daily struggles of Ceylon's native inhabitants, he rightly became an opponent of Imperialism. The impact of this experience on him was of such a deep extent that he decided to write the novel *The Village in the Jungle* in 1913. In it, he addresses the topic of Imperialism and the struggle to survive being a native dweller of a country that was under the power of another one, with the consequent implications it meant, such as diseases, a superstition-based culture, and, more importantly, an unsympathetic colonial system. The novel was in the limelight when it was published, since it showed Imperialism from a perspective that was new. All the previous works on the subject had been written from the point of view of the coloniser, not from that of the indigenous. It also set the pace for the rest of the literary works that would be published later on in Sri Lanka, where it is still nowadays popularly known and seen as a sociological description of the region in the 20th century, as the writer and BBC broadcaster Nick Rankin has reportedly stated in many interviews and podcasts about the novel ("Woolf in the Jungle")

The general thinking in the 20th century was that people of a darker skin colour were inferior to those who had a lighter skin tone, but this novel did not only change Leonard's mind-set, but that of the Bloomsbury group as well. Furthermore, the novel was written before many other ground-breaking writings on the subjects were even published, such as "Burmese Days", by George Orwell, who is well known for his works on Communism, Imperialism and other systems of hierarchy. One year after the publication of *The Village in the Jungle*, and having Leonard come back to England to marry Virginia, the First World War burst. However, before the conflict sparked off, the tension had been building up in the involved countries for years. Nationalism had been

spreading out, and political leaders were hungry for power. Virginia Woolf had written *The Voyage Out*, but due to the severity of the situation, its publication had to be postponed something that was not welcomed by her.

Since Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf had a very similar ideology in regards to this topic, it is not surprising to find that Leonard dedicated the novel to her: “I’ve given you all the little, that I’ve to give; you’ve given me all, that for me is all there is; so now I just give back what you have given- If there is anything to give in this.” (*The Village in the Jungle*, I) Since they had the same point of view on the topic, they had a very significant influence on each other. One month after the war ended, Woolf wrote that “the war is already almost forgotten” (*Diary I*: 227). She expressed how the shift from war to peace was confusing, and she wrote: “However peace came & dissipated all that; & now where are we? According to Roger, on the brink of a revolution.” (220) However, although the conflict had just come to an end, it was just the beginning for Woolf and the rest of the members of the Bloomsbury group. In her post-war writings, we can find many instances in which she expresses a feeling of fake immunity. She had learned from war that there is no immunity from its effects, and everyone was under its threat, both for combatants and for civilians. It is for this reason that she focused more her writings on the Peace day, and did not want to give an account of “the effects of the war”. We can often see how she talks about the peace celebrations, in contrast with the sorrow she felt: “It was a melancholy thing to see the incurable soldiers lying bed at the Star & Garter with their backs to us, smoking cigarettes, & waiting for the noise to be over. We were children to be amused.” (Woolf 1919: 294) This event that she narrated felt incongruous with the violence that was suffered during the previous four years of conflict, and even with the sorrow that the soldiers who managed to come back home felt.

Woolf was asked by the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* to review various books recording experiences of the Great War, yet we find that she made little reference to these writings (e.g.: *Heard on the Downs: The Genesis of Myth*, 1916) in her reviews of war-related volumes, and in an opposite way, mentioned it frequently in her letters and diary (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volumes I-V). In spite of the feeling of despair, Woolf was optimistic, and believed it would not take place again: “I can’t help being glad that your precious imp will be born into a moderately reasonable

world.” (Woolf 1888: 290) This contrasts with the pessimistic viewpoint she had before the Great War started. She did not suspect that 27 years after, the Second World War would take place, having an even deeper impact on her life, since it would be (along with many other factors) the cusp of her suicide.

### **The booming of psychoanalysis**

On the opposing side of the Great War, the declaration of war was welcomed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and there was a general sentiment of patriotism \_\_\_\_\_. In the capital of Austria, Vienna, and the home of Sigmund Freud, people lived the beginning of the conflict with excitement, since it would give them the vengeance they had been longing for after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. This, combined with the romantic idealisation of war and the fact that the previous conflicts had not lasted long, submerged people into the thought that it would be a minor confrontation with no extensive casualties.

Decades before the Great War, Freud, another fundamental figure in history, started developing a set of theories that would later have a great impact not only in the field of Psychology, but also on Virginia Woolf herself. In 1896, Sigmund Freud coined the term “Psychoanalysis” when he wrote *Die Traumdeutung*, where he gives an account of the therapies he had been following with a series of patients, and explains the main ideas behind this doctrine. He briefly defined it as a method “of treating nervous patients medically.” Freud claimed that the human mind consists of three main parts: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious. According to him, there are certain events that take place during the childhood of a person and that are forgotten and rooted in the unconscious. These events can be found in dreams, which can be interpreted in order to find the cause of the trauma and the consequent medical conditions that flourish in the patient, which range from neurosis to depression, anxiety and hysteria. This last term was coined by Freud in order to designate a state of mind typical of women who had an excess of emotions. It comes from the Greek word “hyster”, which means “uterus”. What this term suggests is that this malady is restricted to women. This statement would portray women as irrational beings that are incapable of controlling their emotions, and confers a hint of craziness upon the figure of the woman and cast doubt on the female fight for equality that was starting to burst. In addition to this, Freud made the presumption that sexual conflicts played an “uncommonly large

role” in the cause of nervous and mental diseases. (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, 16)

Although Freud was much criticised when he first spoke about Psychoanalysis, he managed to make his ideas be heard, and years after, Psychoanalysis finally lived its apogee at the same time the Great War was taking place, and gained popularity, especially among writers. Freud stated that an author’s piece of writing was not the result of his/her wit, but rather “transfers all his interests, his libido, too, to the elaboration of his imaginary wishes, all of which might easily point the way to neurosis.” (Freud 329)

Accordingly, he denied the general conception of literature and art in general. He showed an undermining opinion on the traditional conceptions of what creativity was; and believed that, under the creativity an author may claim to have, a literary work was actually under the pressure of the personal history of its author, who did not have any control over it. What is more, Freud was certain that he could interpret the inner drives of any artist in any given historical context by analysing their dreams and writings, as he did in one of his studies about Leonardo da Vinci, titled *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1990) These ideas did not let anyone detached, and were widely criticised by the writers of the time, including Virginia Woolf. I will develop further this topic in the following chapter. It was in this context of war that Sigmund Freud wrote *Reflections on War and Death* (six months after the outbreak of the war) with the aim of giving an objective explanation of human suffering and why it is a physiological necessity. According to him, selfishness and cruelty are part of our “primitive nature”. However, he emphasised on the fact that the modern society could not carry out violent acts and call itself civilised, since they are contradictory ideas. (Freud 1918: 3)

The topic of war and violence would be commented by him even decades after the conflict had finished. In 1931, the League of Nations invited Albert Einstein to exchange ideas with another thinker about politics and peace. The result was a number of letters that he exchanged with Sigmund Freud discussing the themes of violence, peace and the nature of the human being. They were compiled in a pamphlet under the title *Why War?* In 1933, but only 2.000 copies were printed, and all that remains of them are online PDF documents. (“Transcend International”) Among many questions,

Freud tried to find an answer to matters related to the impact that the community has on our willingness and how it may impel us to go to war and carry out violent acts. Freud's dislike for war and violence matched that of Virginia Woolf, as he expresses in *Reflections on War and Death*: "Why do you and I and so many other people rebel so violently against war?" To Freud, war was the most opposite behaviour to that expected from a civilisation as ours. It is precisely for this reason that he found violence unacceptable and thought that a rebellion was necessary. He openly declared himself a pacifist when he wrote to Einstein in 1932: "we pacifists have a constitutional intolerance of war. [...] And how long shall we have to wait before the rest of mankind become pacifists too?" For him, the answer to the matter of violence was that the human being has an inherent will to protect our right to live. In addition, according to him, this will has been present for incalculable ages, and has shaped mankind. Given the above observations, we can say that the historical context that Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud lived had a great impact on their ideologies, although they would differ in many other subjects (as we will see next). They both lived events that showed the war-like attitude of the human being, and they agreed on the uncivilised ground in which the First and the Second World War (and violence in general) were based.



## **Ideological discrepancies and common ground**

### **Virginia Woolf and doctors, Sigmund Freud and women**

In this chapter I would like to address three main aspects that, although they might not seem to have a direct correlation, have a great importance in the discourse of the two scholars, as well as the opinions they had about each other. While Woolf had a negative experience with doctors, Freud's studies ultimately revolve around the figure of the woman, who he was incapable of understanding. These two aspects were crucial for the development of their lives and, consequently, their writings and ideas. Finally, I will focus on the opinion and influence they had on each other and whether they ever got to have some kind of interaction beyond the academic field.

It is commonly known that Virginia Woolf had to deal with mental health issues from an early age. It was not a sole reason that led her to be mentally ill, but rather a compendium of events. First, she suffered sexual abuse from her half-brothers (George and Gerald Duckworth) when she was a child. Then, she had to live with the incarceration at home of one of her half-sisters, since she was thought to be mentally abnormal. This; followed by the death of her mother in 1895 when Virginia was only 13 years old; the death of her eldest half-sister (who had been in charge of the family after their mother's death) and the death of her father from cancer on 22 February, 1904 caused her to go through alternate periods of mental instability and strength. After each one of these tragic events, she had a nervous breakdown, but it was not until her father died that she suffered from hallucinations and tried to commit suicide for the first time. Finally, two years later (when she was 22) her brother died as well, causing her to have another nervous breakdown. As we can see, her life with her family was a series of intervals of depression, mental breakdowns and brief stability. Although there wasn't a clear diagnosis of her mental health issues, nowadays we know from her autobiographical essays ("A Sketch of the Past and 22 Hyde Park Gate") that she suffered from bipolar syndrome. The knowledge we have nowadays on Woolf's mental problems is given by the writings of her relatives and friends, who wrote about her, and Virginia herself (with her autobiography). These people are mainly her husband Leonard, Virginia's nephew Quentin Bell and his wife Anne Olivier Bell among others.

For instance, Bell wrote in his biography of the death of Woolf's mother: "We do not know, although we may fairly guess, that there were headaches, sudden nervous leaps of the heart and a growing awareness that there was something very wrong with her mind [...] all that summer she was mad." (Trombley 2)

After her mother's death, when she was living with her family, she spent most of her time in the sickroom, the dining-room and her bedroom, always on duty. She felt bitterness towards her father, but this feeling was in conflict with the sorrow she felt having to see him live with cancer day by day until he finally died. Woolf had three nurses during this period, who, after her father's death, became demons for her. She heard voices and had nightmares every night. Not long after, she attempted to commit suicide: "she threw herself from a window, which, however, was not high enough from the ground to cause her serious harm. It was here too that she lay in bed, listening to the birds singing in Greek and imagining that King Edward VII lurked in the azaleas using the foulest possible language." (6)

Woolf lived very traumatic experiences in a very short period of time and right when her personality and character were being shaped. Therefore, the impact they had on her transcend the topic of death and health, and many other spheres of her life were affected. Since she was very young, Woolf had a bad relationship with food, and we could even say that she "feared" it. In her biography, Quentin Bell states: "Her sensitivity on this point was perhaps connected with her own phobias about eating, phobias which, when she was ill, could make her starve herself and, at ordinary times, made her always very reluctant to take a second helping of anything." (Bell 98) As Woolf herself expressed in many of her novels through the characters: "He himself [...] never wished to understand that his wife, equally thin, might in fact be suffering about the possibility of becoming fat, obese, gross and therefore... stupid." (qtd. in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*) According to Roger Pool in his book *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, for her, "eating, digesting, and sitting still, were loathsome activities which led directly to visual ugliness, as well as to spiritual and intellectual decadence." Woolf did not want to eat in excess, and had a feeling of shame in her own body when she did eat. It is generally believed that the reason for this was the sexual abuse she suffered when she was very young by George and Gerald Duckworth (whom she

connects with a common image: the horrible face of animal lust’). Woolf gives an account of these episodes in her memoir, which I shall now cite:

“Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it -- what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive.”  
(Trombley 10)

We can infer that, according to Virginia, there was a direct correlation between food, fattening and the consequences it had on the way she looked. Taking into account the sexual abuse she suffered, it is within reason that she did not like certain parts of her body being touched, which affected her emotional and sexual life profoundly, and, ultimately, her marriage with Leonard as well. In order to try to help her with her mental health issues, Virginia Woolf was treated by eminent doctors of “psychological medicine” throughout her life. However, they were not of much help. Some of them even worsened her situation. In many occasions, they portrayed her as a “bed-ridden lunatic” (11). We should take statements like these as completely subjective, since it has nowadays been proved that, in fact, Woolf spent more time in bed because of physical indisposition (i.e.: influenza, pneumonia, headaches and toothache) than because of her “madness”. The doctors that treated her used the term “moral insanity” in a medical sense, but scholars nowadays differ from the use it was given, and write it between inverted quotes, since they believe it is a dubious concept and mixes morality and medicine. Therefore, I shall write it between inverted quotes as well in this essay. If Woolf’s writings were given nowadays to a contemporary doctor, she would be given very different diagnoses, such as manic-depression, various types of schizophrenia, anorexia nervosa (because of the disgust she felt towards her body, as I have previously explained) and depression; which would start and finish with each traumatic episode she experienced.

It is generally acknowledged that doctors were present in Woolf's family. It is for this reason that she had an opinion on doctors and medicine from a very young age, and it conditioned the following years. Medicine at the time was inaccurate, and patients were often wrongly diagnosed, as it could have been the case of Woolf. Some scholars even state that, according to certain writings (such as *Moments of Being*), the deaths of Julia Stephen and Stella Duckworth could have been avoided, but the doctors were incapable of agreeing on one single diagnosis.

In order to illustrate this, I shall now address three of the most important doctors who treated the different members of the Stephen family. The existing information about the doctors who treated the Stephens can be found in Woolf's personal correspondence between her and Violet Dickinson (between May 1897 and the end of 1903) and her diaries. In those letters, she explains her observations on the medical profession. Dr Seton was one of the first doctors to have a relationship with the family. He was present during Julia Stephen's death when Virginia was only 13 years old, and looked after her father as well when he was found to have cancer. At the age of 20, Virginia had a critical view of Seton and calls him "wool gatherer" (Trombley 94) with a negative connotation in her letters. It is probable that, during the years she knew him, the deaths that followed that of her mother made her change her opinion on medicine. When Leslie Stephen was already ill and in bed, the eminent doctor Sir Frederick Treves started to treat him as well. He had been "Surgeon Extraordinary to Queen Victoria" (Trombley 94) from 1901 to 1902, and operated Edward VII as well in 1902. According to Woolf, the two doctors disagreed on the diagnosis of her father, and while one of them said he was recovering from his illness, the other believed Leslie's situation was worsening:

"Treves is rather worrying. He thinks father not so well, and says he will probably have to have the operation in about six weeks. But Seton says just the opposite: he thinks Treves has forgotten how bad father was in the summer, and doesn't see that he is better now than he was then." (Woolf 1945: 61)

Leslie Stephen died two years later. Dr Seton, had been present in the deaths of Virginia's parents, and, within reason, he seemed to be a “harbinger of death” to her (Trombey, 96). Dr Seton was also the doctor who banned her from reading and writing, the two most important activities for her. With the intention of helping Virginia, Dr Seton prohibited her from doing any intellectual or physical activity and declared she could not read or write for her own well-being: “My Dear Dr Seton says I must not do any lessons this term.”(qtd. in Trombley 93) This, along with more negative experiences, led to a resentment that Virginia would eventually feel towards the doctor. Right after Dr Seton, Sir George Henry Savage took the relay and started treating Virginia. He already had experience with the Stephen family. In 1904 he banned her from going to London, a city which had much meaning to her, for it was her home and her source of inspiration and amusement. It was such a negative experience for her that Savage let her go back to the city just one week after: “I long for a large room to myself, with books and nothing else, where I can shut myself up, and see no one, and read myself into peace.” (147). In 1905 Savage stated Virginia was finally cured. These three doctors were some of the many Woolf had to meet in her life, and we can find many more accounts of her fear to doctors and the like on her diary entries. Her fear was not restrained just to doctors themselves, but to anyone whose profession was health-related. On 15 February, 1915 we find the last entry she wrote that year. She had an appointment with the dentist two days later. After the appointment, Woolf suffered from increasingly bad health issues. It started as a headache and progressively evolved into sleepless nights and days resting in bed. Leonard took care of her until nurses were finally called in. During the following weeks, Woolf “was incoherent, excited and violent, for many months more she was under constant surveillance.” She did not improve until June, and the last nurse left in November, when Woolf returned to normal life. (Woolf 1915: 35)

Overall, Woolf's experience with doctors was unendingly negative. Not only did they prove to be fruitless in their intention of treating the family, but they also impeded her from carrying out the activities that meant the most in her life, such as reading and writing. She found in them an escape from her mind's troubles and the reality she lived, which was riddled with death, sorrow and “madness”. It stands to reason that these prohibitions ultimately resulted in a strong dislike to doctors and a rejection to receive

medical treatment: "My life is a constant fight against Doctors follies, it seems to me" (Virginia Woolf to Violet Dickinson, 26 November 1904).

Although both Sigmund Freud and Virginia Woolf lived the same historical period and were raised in a society ruled by men and patriarchy, the way they envisioned the world and their ideologies was completely different in certain aspects. While Woolf is known for her feminist writings, Freud thought the woman was unfinished and inherently inferior to men because of their lack of the male sexual organ. He thought that this absence was the source of the women's struggle to be as rational and "perfect" as the man. Even years after starting to develop his theory about psychoanalysis, he stated that women had the only purpose of serving men's desires.

Freud lived surrounded by women since he was born, but he could not find a way to understand and communicate with them. He would have to deal with women in his adulthood as well. Therefore, it is clear that women played a crucial part in his life, and he made them be the protagonist of his studies. The theory and writings on hysteria that he developed years later were focused on women, and we know from Freud's early work with hysteria that most of his patients were upper middle-class women, who had been educated at home by private tutors and were literate. However, the experiences he lived and his difficulty to understand women could be the main reasons why his works are so focused on them in a negative way and, ultimately, disagree in many ideas with Woolf, who had a very different upbringing.

### **Testimonies about each other**

An important aspect that I shall now discuss is whether Woolf and Freud actually got to know each other and have a conversation in which to exchange ideas. Interestingly enough, although there are no accounts of Freud and Woolf exchanging correspondence, the two authors got to meet each other. It was on January 28, 1939, at the Maresfield Gardens. According to Julia Briggs in the Charleston Trust Festival (28 June 2011) Woolf said to him: "We have often felt guilty – if we had failed to win the Great War, perhaps Hitler would not have been. Freud replied: "It would have been infinitely worse if you had not won the war." Subsequently, he gave her a narcissus. It was not after this episode that Woolf finally read his work. She had been avoiding

reading Freud's works, but it is important to mention that it might have been difficult for her to avoid it, since her husband, Leonard Woolf, was a supporter of Freud, and her brother Adrian Stephen (along with his wife) were psychoanalysts. Also, Woolf's Hogarth Press was responsible for the publication of the first translation of Freud's works into English. After their encounter, Woolf said that Freud was "a screwed up shrunken very old man: ... inarticulate: but alert. ... Immense potential, I mean an old fire now flickering." (Woolf 1939: 202). Therefore, we can see that, although they had opposite ideas in many aspects, they admired each other up to a certain point, as writers and academics.

Woolf's avoidance and rejection of psychoanalysis could logically be linked to her previous negative experiences with doctors and mental illness. Although Woolf and Freud were separated by a considerable age gap (twenty-six years), they both lived, as we have previously seen, historical events that would deeply mark their lives. Such is the case, for instance, of the First World War. In addition, their upbringings had been relatively similar (without taking into account the privilege Freud had had in a patriarchal society in comparison to Woolf). They had been both raised by middle-class, patriarchal families, and, unlike many other people in the 19th century, they had access to education. However, the age gap was not their only difference, and they were radically opposed in certain subjects. Feminism and gender equality was one of them. Freud believed that patriarchy was the natural social order. Woolf was wholeheartedly against it, and considered it to be dangerous and tyrannical. As we have also seen previously, Freud's theories interrogated the nature of the creative powers of writers and artists in general, and Woolf, along with other authors such as James Joyce, resisted actively to the threat that Freud seemed to pose.

In opposition to Freud's thoughts, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce had a much different opinion. When talking about the writing process, Joyce used the term "transcendental impersonality", which was necessary, according to him, for every author to withdraw from the world and let the piece of writing take a physical form. He even called his works "artificial reconstructions of a transcendental view of experience" (Hendry 1946: 449-467). It could even be said that Joyce gave such process a hint of mysticism, calling the end of the process (that is the writer) God.

Woolf openly claimed she had never read anything in relation to psychoanalysis. However, numerous scholars agree on the fact that many of her writings have Freudian tinges and references to the psychoanalyst's theories. Such is the case, for instance, of her second novel *Night and Day* (1919), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The Cambridge English Faculty professor Julia Briggs, who dedicated her career to the study of Virginia Woolf's life, suggested in 2006 at the Charleston Festival that Woolf knew Freud's theory much sooner than she realized." She claims that the ideas she had about psychoanalysis did not come from her own reading of Freud's works, but was brought into the Bloomsbury circle and they were unconsciously noticed by Woolf.

Whatever the case might be, on December 2, 1939, Woolf wrote in her diary: "Began reading Freud last night [...] to give my brain a wider scope." (Woolf 1939: 219) It seems that something happened in 1939 that changed Woolf's mind about psychoanalysis and encouraged her to start reading Freud. According to the author Panthea Reid Broughton, Woolf would have read the correspondence between Roger and Vanessa (her brother and his wife, both psychoanalysts) and found a remark "that suggested Freud's applicability to Woolf and provoked Woolf to read Freud attentively for the first time." (*A Companion to Virginia Woolf* 2016: 155) On May 20, 1940, we can see that Woolf incorporates Freudian terms into her writings. An instance is the term "anal". Interestingly enough, in the posthumous edition of her diary that her husband did, the term "anal" is changed to "analysis". Although there is no certainty in this, it is commonly thought that Leonard could possibly think that Virginia had abbreviated the word "analysis" as "anal". However, there are accounts of Olivier and Quentin Bell writing to the editor of Virginia's diary saying that they cannot recall her ever doing so. Whether Woolf had read Freud's writings before or not cannot be completely proved, since there is no written evidence of it before the year 1940, but the fact that she uses terms which are related to his set of theories could indicate that she did. As much as Freud and Woolf disagreed in many aspects, they found common ground in other areas of knowledge. Freud claimed that the basic force that moves the human being and triggers our passions and wishes was sexuality, and it was intrinsic to our society and our culture; and he explains that "civilization is built up on renunciation of instinctual gratifications." (Freud 1930: 63) Consequently, he believed that the sexual life of a civilised man "is seriously disabled", since our sexuality is repressed by society. Accordingly, as Kathleen Higgins reflects in her book *Psychoanalysis and Art*



(1995) he called artists “immature and narcissistic individuals” and considered Art to be a socially acceptable expression of a hidden sexual desire.

In this matter, Woolf agreed with him that the conscience is responsible for the repression to which civilisation is subdued, and that it consisted on the internalization of an external authority (societal rules, governing systems, etc.). Furthermore, she also found that this conscience is what represses those instincts of the human being that are aggressive or libidinous. Many authors, such as Panthea Reid Broughton Broughton, in his book *Virginia Is Anal*, find that in her last novel *Between the Acts* she juxtaposes “the progress of English civilisation (embodied in the pageant) against the reminders of England’s primeval past and man’s animal origins.” (Broughton) What they both Woolf and Freud agreed on was that man was too aggressive and self-protective to love his neighbours, much less his enemies, as himself. However, Freud and Woolf disagreed more often than they did agree, and had contrary ideas on the working grounds of each other. While Freud criticised writers and artists in general, Woolf, as we have seen, did not have a positive opinion about doctors and, more specifically, about psychoanalysts. On the one hand, Freud reduced the meaning of art work to one single purpose: “cure”. He stated that artists were immature and narcissist individual. For him, the child, the neurotic and the creative artist are more daring in their reordering of them than any other member of a given society, but he applied this statement to the entire literary field, reducing, therefore, the importance of writers and simplifying their work and their wit. On the other hand, Woolf disliked Freud’s interpretation of literature, and, according to her, “It simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches.” (*Essays III*, 197) She disliked the fact that, from the perspective of a psychoanalyst, literature was only a means of “healing” of one’s mind, rather than the ultimate expression of the thoughts of a knowledgeable person brought to readers in the form of the highest art form.



## *Mrs Dalloway*

### **General analysis**

In this chapter I will analyse Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway* taking into account all the topics discussed previously, which conformed a great part of Woolf's life and ideology and that are ultimately represented in this literary piece. From sexuality and the female body to insanity and madness, Woolf manages to integrate her own experience and criticism in a single literary work which provides the reader with the underestimated point of view of the woman. This work had a great impact and relevance at the time it was published. Woolf uses a series of themes and literary devices that are masterly connected, resulting in an absolutely ground-breaking literary revolution.

The entire novel is set in one single day in June (1923) in London. Woolf designed the novel in such a way that the reader can get to many different perspectives of the same city. These perspectives are provided by characters of different social class, gender, age, wealth and ideology. Consequently, there is an ensemble of pieces that can even make the reader ask themselves whether there is an actual plot that links all the events and scenes depicted. Woolf manages to link all these characters and their perspectives and form a final product which encompasses all the aspects of the society of the time that she wanted to approach; a society that had survived the Great War, but not without huge changes in all spheres of life.

We find twelve different double spaces between narrative segments which are longer than the usual (i.e.: a blank line between the last line of one paragraph and the next one) and indicate we are about to read the story from a different perspective, place or even time. The changes of scenario are signalled by the strike of the clock, e.g.: "For with overpowering directness and dignity the clock struck three; and she heard nothing else; but the door handle slipped round and in came Richard!" (154) Living in the society of 1923 meant having to deal with a series of unspoken rules which governed one's life. From marriage to sexuality and even economy. Virginia Woolf was no exception to this reality, and she wanted to show this through the characters of the novel.

## Characters

As the authors Vereen M. Bell and Vereen Bell state in their essay “Misreading *Mrs Dalloway*”, the novel is “disconcertingly polycentric”. There are so many instances of thoughts of the different characters and so many perspectives that it is difficult to see Clarissa as the protagonist, and she rather seems to be a “unifying device around which other characters’ thoughts cohere.” (94) However, the protagonist is, in fact, Mrs Dalloway, a wealthy woman of the Victorian London who is celebrating a party at her house the same day in which the story takes place. This character is addressed with two different names. One is Clarissa Dalloway and the other, Mrs Dalloway. Each name is used to show a different perspective of her. The former is the name used by the closest people to her, those who she knows best. The latter is used to subsume her identity as a woman and show that she is married, and “reinforces a lack of individuality” (Johnston 23). This name is used by strangers and people who serve for her. From the very beginning, including the title, we see how the character has to deal with a duality she does to feel comfortable with.

Clarissa is married to Richard Dalloway. However, he is not the only love in Clarissa’s life. When she was younger, she fell in love with Sally Seton, a friend of hers. By the way their love is presented, it seems that Clarissa sometimes regrets having married Richard, especially when she remembers the time they kissed as “the most exquisite moment of her whole life.” (45) Along with Sally Seton, another lover from Clarissa’s past appears. He is Peter Walsh, a middle-aged man who has spent the last five years in India and goes back to London. In spite of his attempts to forget her love for Clarissa (even by proposing to another woman in India), he still loves her. Whether Clarissa feels the same way or not, is not explicitly mentioned, but she does ask herself whether the choice she made years ago (marrying Richard and not Peter) was the best one for her. Peter is different to Richard in many ways, but the most fundamental one is their way of thinking. Whereas Richard is stiff and formal, Peter shares his interest for art with Clarissa, and was able to express his love for her in a way that Richard could not: “Cleverness was silly. One must say simply what one felt.” (251)

Another crucial character in the story is Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked veteran of war who has returned home after having seen how his best friend was blown-up during the war. He is a self-made and self-educated man, who has been destroyed by war. “Shell shock” was the name by which today’s post-traumatic stress disorder was

commonly known at the time. For the first time in history, factories produced weapons and explosives in mass that caused dreadful injuries and dismemberment. So, literally, the name stands for a shock due to a projectile. It was a medical condition without precedents, and doctors did not know who could suffer it or even its cause. There was no previous knowledge on trench warfare and its consequences. It is for this reason that the shell shock condition was stigmatised. According to the rules that society dictated, men and women had to fulfil the different roles of femininity and masculinity that they were imposed. Men who suffered this condition were unable to suppress their emotions, which, at the time, was considered to be a lack of masculinity. In the case of Septimus Smith, he lives in constant stress due to two main factors. The first one is the conflict he had lived and the scenes of cruelty and death he had been exposed to. The second factor was his “inability” to cope with his emotions and “be a man.” The madness of this character is portrayed from the beginning of the story, but it increases as the narration continues. For instance, the first time Septimus appears in the story, we see how he is suddenly terrified by the large number of people surrounding him. However, all of a sudden, the narration of his thoughts and fears is interrupted by his wife’s intervention (“Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? “Let us go on, Septimus,” said his wife.”) In comparison, at the end of the novel, Septimus starts having recurrent visions and hallucinations, and we clearly see how his madness increases (e.g.: “And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames! Actually she would look for flames, it was so vivid. But there was nothing. They were alone in the room. It was a dream, she would tell him and so quiet him at last, but sometimes she was frightened too. She sighed as she sat sewing.”)

The Great War affected all spheres of life, and created an instability that Virginia managed to reflect on this writing. Woolf herself felt the sudden change that came with peace, as we can read in her diaries (“peace dropped like a great stone into my pool” (Woolf 1918: 219)) and had to adapt to it. She reflects this feeling of instability and change throughout the main characters in the book. In the case of Clarissa, we find that her mind is fragmented, and she tries to pull herself together and make choices that do not contradict the rules of society and that make her happy as well. In the same way, Septimus has to deal with the psychological consequences of war and still be masculine, a good husband and the head of the family.

## Freud and Septimus Smith's "shell shock"

The technology and methods used in the Great War were completely new to everyone, their consequences were unknown for many people, and there was a general ignorance regarding Shell-shock and posttraumatic stress disorder. Many scholars found a new issue to discuss. Academics found new ground on which to base their theories and writings. Trauma became a recurrent theme in novels of that time, and psychologists tried to find a logical explanation of why people endured it. Sigmund Freud was one of them.

In his writing *Beyond the Pleasure* (1919), he tries to approach this topic and find the root of the so-called "shell shock." His reasoning can be applied to the mental disorder that the character Septimus Smith suffers in *Mrs Dalloway*, especially if we take into account the influence that Psychoanalysis had at the time in science and, indirectly, over Woolf's ideas. In *Beyond the Pleasure*, Freud starts by asking himself why people who suffer posttraumatic stress disorder repeat compulsively the experience which lead to their disorder instead of repressing it, which would be the logical conduct. According to Freud, certain organisms wish to return to an earlier state which was simpler. This state would be even prior to our emergence into life. In other words, the organism, when facing death (an unknown state), wishes to anticipate to it and return to a similar state which is already known and took place before we were born. Paul Fry, professor of English at Yale University, explained Freud's theory in his lecture *Freud and Fiction*, and emphasised the importance of understanding that Freud's theory does not suggest that people with posttraumatic stress disorder are suicidal or want to hurt themselves in any way, but rather that they want to be prepared for death and, in case they die, do it within their own terms. He goes further and explains that people who suffered this disorder blame themselves for having failed to vigilate, and they try to do it later in life. Taking these considerations into account, we can explain Septimus Smith's behaviour and thinking in *Mrs Dalloway*, and understand how a disabled veteran felt in the 1920s. There are many passages in which Septimus' memories come to live in the form of hallucinations, which become increasingly vivid with the passing of the day. There is a particular excerpt in the book in which Septimus shows how he feels about the death of his friend Evans during the war:

“So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel. He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was worst [...] The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death.”(118)

Septimus feels dreadfully guilty for various reasons, and we need to understand each one of them in order to have a general understanding of his behaviour. The first one is because he did not feel or care when his friend Evans was killed, he is convinced that he could have done more in order to protect him. In relation to this, he feels he has failed to fulfil an attribute which is common to all human beings: instinct. Furthermore, he does not find his value as a man according to the modern society's idea of masculinity. The character is completely convinced of his guilt, and that the punishment for it is death, e.g.: “The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death” (118) If we follow Freud's idea of pleasure and death, Septimus blames himself for having failed to vigilate and care for his friend during war, and tries to make up for his mistakes in the past by compulsively being alert.

One of the most important scenes in the novel is the suicide of Septimus Smith. His madness has been increasing, and his hallucinations have become more recurrent and vivid with time. However, Septimus' suicide does not take place during a moment of “madness”, but rather a moment of happiness. This, perhaps, is what strikes the reader the most. The question that arises is why he commits suicide? Although there is a moment in which he does have a vision of his friend Evans, what truly triggers his decision is the arrival of the two doctors. Prior to their arrival, Septimus and his wife Rezia share laughs for the first time in a long time, and Rezia feels grateful for it: “For she could say anything to him now. She could say whatever came into her head. That was almost the first thing she had felt about him.” (191) The writer creates a scene of happiness and joy, which is broken in a sudden by the interruption of the doctors. Septimus, who does not want to be separated from his wife, refuses to receive them, and so does his wife. However, they manage to go upstairs and get to the room where he is. He envisages all the different ways in which he could commit suicide, although “he did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot.” (195) Finally, doctor Holmes enters and just in that precise moment, Septimus flings himself from the window.

It is reasonable to think, therefore, that the answer to the previously posed question is the following. The doctor wants to separate him from his wife and “possess” him, his freedom, and wants to invade his privacy, the only thing that is left from him and the person he was before the war. Doctors mean oppression and domination. Septimus feels in constant distress, at the idea of being dominated again, of not being in control as he failed to be when Evans was killed in front of his very eyes. The last sentence that Septimus utters is “I’ll give it to you!” (195) and it has an ironic sense. Septimus feels that the doctor is in a way coming for him, to possess him; and he answers by “giving” him his body, but not his mind nor his soul. The doctor’s response is to call Septimus “coward”, which is a reflection of the common thought that people had of people with shell-shock, who had “failed” to fulfil their duty during war. In this way, Virginia Woolf reflects her own negative experiences with doctors through this character. As it has previously been stated, she felt an utter aversion towards them, and any time she attended a doctor, her symptoms worsened, she had to lay in bed and was confined at home. In the same way that Septimus was exposed to constant grief and danger and developed posttraumatic stress disorder, Virginia Woolf herself had to deal with great amounts of stress when her relatives died. She found a way to express her feelings through writing, and chose a character whose fears matched those of her. They both found the solution to their problems in death.

To finish with this topic, we could add another interpretation to the suicide scene in the novel. If the Great War had not taken place, Septimus would not have committed suicide ultimately. As she reflected on her diaries, Woolf was against violence of any kind, and thought it was contradictory to the behaviour of a “civilised” society. She “sets her treatment of Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* against the backdrop of a changed post-war society.” (Floyd 2016) The author calls into question war and violence, and uses the example of Septimus to show how deep its consequences were for the British society.

### **Sexuality and the female body**

To finish with, one of the most important motives of the work is sexuality. Clarissa is no longer the beautiful young lady that she used to be. She has aged, is married and has a child. According to the common ideology of that time, it was a synonym of being less valuable and less feminine. Therefore, Clarissa feels the constant need to prove her



femininity. Another aspect which Woolf makes sure to make visible in the book is fluid sexuality. Clarissa decided to marry Richard, but she also fell in love with Sally Seton. The kissing scene that she remembers is an example. The purpose of reflecting this in the novel was, firstly to show how compulsory heterosexuality was at that age, and how it goes hand in hand with the class system, imperialism and any kind of relation of power; secondly, she wanted to reflect her own experience. Woolf, being part of the Bloomsbury group, had gay friends and had a progressive attitude towards sex. She had an affair with Vita Sackville-West, and she was open about it.

It is important to note that, in the same way the kiss between Clarissa and Sally is interrupted by Peter, fluid sexuality was “interrupted” by the heteronormative model which governed the society of that time. Therefore, the fact that Virginia decided to include this topic in her novel shows how judgemental she was towards the general mind-set, which she felt was repressive and coercive. Again, we see how Woolf criticises the system from every point of view possible, including sexuality. From the perspective of Psychoanalysis, there is an explanation to the different ways in which Clarissa interacts with men and women. In the compendium of essays “Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory” (1910) Sigmund Freud analysed sexuality and its development during childhood and puberty, and tried to explain the operational mechanisms that lead to different forms of sexual expression and even mental illnesses. Freud stated that neurotics “conserve the infantile state of their sexuality” and that it can either end in a normal sexual life, a perversion or neurosis. (33) Furthermore, he believed that the experiences we live have an impression on us, which we can forget about, but nevertheless “left the deepest traces in our psychic life, and acted as determinants for our whole future development.” (36) Hence, this reasoning “can be shown to offer a sustained and developing dialogue between Woolf’s fiction and Freud’s theory.”

In relation to this, one of the most important ideas that Freud outlines is that there is a phallic stage in life in which there is “an unconscious development of desire.” In the case of women, as A.A. Brill states in his essay “Psychoanalysis - Its Theories and Practical Application”, that desire is not fulfilled because of the absence of a penis. This theory can be applied to the portrait of the different relationships that the female protagonist of *Mrs Dalloway* (Clarissa) has with both men and women. In the novel, there is a constant presence of female bonds, for instance, between Sally and Clarissa or

even between Clarissa and her daughter Elisabeth; and there is a constant disruption of such bonds “through male interference.” (Johnston 27) From the perspective of Freud’s ideas, Sally would be “a replacement of Clarissa’s deeply repressed penis envy.” (28) This can be seen, for instance, in sentences such as “She hadn’t got it herself, she always envied” (Woolf 1925: 42), in which we see that Clarissa realises she is missing something. Therefore, it can be said that the novel conveys the idea of castration theory and the Oedipus complex “on a metaphorical level.” (Johnston 29) However, their relationship is not consummate, since Clarissa finally decides to marry Richard and her affair with Sally ends. In accordance to Freud’s Psychoanalysis, the fact that Clarissa chooses a man over a woman suggests an arrival at “normal femininity” (qtd. in Johnston 30) which, for Freud, is the necessary final stage of a woman's development. (30) The fact that Freud considers homosexuality to be the normal femininity indicates that his discourse is rooted in a heteronormative ideology, which was the norm in the beginning of the twentieth-century society’s mind-set.

Concerning the novel in general, Woolf integrates all these elements (sexuality, inanity, multiplicity of points of view, etc.) which apparently do not have anything in common, but conform a whole and give a complete portrait of the British society of the 1920s, which had been changed abruptly by the Great War. The ideology of Virginia Woolf is essential in the novel, and she tries to make the reader feel the same helplessness that the British society felt when their lives were invaded by a constant threat, sorrow and grief. Because Woolf was a woman ahead of her time, many of the ideas that are reflected in the book could very well fit today’s reality, and the reader can identify with many of the struggles that the characters go through. The characters transcend their material reality and get to explore a completely different world which was unknown at the time: their own minds. And just as them, the author herself is trying to comprehend the complexity of her mind with the ultimate hope of making herself understood by those who did not realise her inner struggles.

## Conclusions

As previously stated in the Introduction, by writing this bachelor thesis, I aimed to give a closer vision of Woolf's writings, in particular *Mrs Dalloway*, taking into account both the historical context in which she lived and Psychoanalysis, a set of theories which burst at the same time as her career as a writer. I also set out to find to what extent her studies of the human being are similar to Freud's studies in spite of their beliefs. When having to interpret a literary text for its psychological elements, many scholars consult Freud's Psychoanalysis. In a similar way, when exploring women's identity and looking for literary pieces in which the mutable identity is reflected, people focus on Woolf's novels. However, they shared a common interest to find how the human mind worked, each one from their own perspective and thinking. As I have proved, there are two basic aspects which played a great role in their careers and writings: on the one hand, mental health; on the other hand, sexuality.

While Woolf provides the reader with a closer perspective into women's mind and constant strivings for self-determination, Freud interprets their psychology by analysing their past trauma, and finds the root of their hysteria in their sexuality. His findings have been so influential that, still nowadays, we find Freudian terminology which we have incorporated into our common language, and we hear sentences such as "it was hidden in my subconscious" or "my subconscious decided." In spite of Woolf's refusal to read Freud's writings for years, as I have shown, there is a certain influence of the psychoanalyst's ideas in the novelist's ideology, and they shared a criticism towards violence and war. It is finally by reading Freud in 1939 in order to give her brain a wider scope that Woolf starts to show interest in the unconscious. In the specific case of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, it can be concluded that the writer manages to portray masterfully the entire spectrum of doubts and struggles that any human being can feel, and manages to give an in-depth portrait of the women's mind in a way that psychoanalysts such as Freud did not manage to achieve.

To finish with, I would like to point out that I have only studied the presence of Psychoanalysis in Woolf's ideology and in her writings (*Mrs Dalloway* in this case), but it would also be interesting to expound on this set of theories and how it was present in the whole Bloomsbury group, since other members, such as Leonard Woolf, showed a great interest in Freud's ideas.



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