Volume 2 Nos. 1 & 2 (2019) ISSN 9091 4582 7142

"WHAT IS THE STUFF OF FICTION?": MODERNIST AESTHETICS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY*

Ethel Ngozi OKEKE
enoya22@yahoo.com
General Studies Division
Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT)

Abstract
Imperialism grew and provoked two world wars, the first of which unleashed the condition, quality and character of the life and time described as modernist. This was marked by a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases of Western art and culture in general. The theory of modernist fiction is distinctively explained in Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction." From the standpoint of this essay, this paper seeks to investigate how modernist aesthetics is reflected in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. The result is that the features of modernist fiction, both in style and theme, are unmistakable in the novel. As things fell apart in the "modern" world of the early twentieth century, Woolf and many other writers responded to that experience through their artistic practices. Up till today, Woolf remains relevant for her enduring contribution to literary art; and, indeed, she deserves a place of honour as the chief priestess of modernist fiction in British Literature.
Key Words: world wars, modernist, fiction, twentieth century, British Literature

Introduction

Virginia Woolf, born Adeline Virginia Stephen in London on 25 January 1882 and died on 28 March 1941, is regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century and one of the foremost modernists, contributing immensely to the form of the novel through the stream of consciousness technique. Her enduring contribution to the development of the art of fiction is summarized in the following words:

> She continued to experiment with the form of the novel, minimizing the importance of facts, events, and character analysis in order to concentrate on the moment by moment experience of living. She eliminated the author as narrator or commentator. She was also a distinguished critic who excelled in conveying the impression made by an author or a work upon a receptive and cultivated mind. (Paul Harvey, 897)

At the turn of the twentieth century, the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 brought to an end the Victorian era known as a time of peace and abundance when the British Empire appeared to be at the climax of its power and security, a time also known for middle class growth, conservative family values and strong

national spirit. Sweeping changes came with the technology that was much more advanced than in the preceding period. A major influence on English literature of this period was imperialism, which grew and tragically provoked the two world wars. There was social unrest evident in the "widespread demand for social reform of every kind; not slow and orderly reform, which is progress, but immediate and intemperate reform, which breeds a spirit of rebellion and despair" (Long 571). Modernist revolt may be traced back to the 1890's when Henry James is quoted to have prophetically declared, "'I have the imagination of disaster, and see life as ferocious and sinister' " (Coombes 217). Ultimately, the First World War of 1914 to 1918 fully unleashed the condition, quality and character of life and time described as modernist, leaving in its trail the tone of disillusionment and alienation. Abrams and Harpham (175) define and situate the term "modernism" as that which is "widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, but especially after World War I." They further add that "many critics agree that it [modernism] involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general." Goring, Hawthorn, and Mitchel relate modernism to the term "avant-garde", a military register referring to the normally small advance guard that is followed by a larger army known as the shock-troops, which in the context of cultural debates in the early part of the twentieth century described "movements which had the aim of assaulting CONVENTIONAL standards and attitudes – particularly but not exclusively in the field of culture and the arts." They further explain:

In general usage, modernism describes that art (not just literature) which sought to break with what had become the dominant and dominating conventions of nineteenth- century art and culture. The most important of these conventions is probably that of REALISM: the modernist artist no longer saw the highest test of his or her art as that of VERISMILITUDE. ((268-269)

Standing on these definitions, therefore, one begins to appreciate how much literature relates to life within time and space. Writers' responses and accounts of the quality of life revealed in a delineated historical moment in the twentieth century have been framed in terms of modernism. To be "modern" in this instance is not necessarily to be modern; rather it means to be sensitive to the prevailing socio-political circumstances marked by startling changes. In effect, literature rose to the occasion to confront reality in a period of change using a new method – the modernist technique. Given the circumstances, it became obvious that "the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with the immense panorama of 'futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'" (Abrams and Harpham 175).

Consequently, in modernist fiction there is an emphasis on a radical individualism as attention is shifted from the material, physical, external reality of man to the internal, spiritual, mental consciousness of man. In the midst of a universal chaos, life does not seem to offer hope of continuity; norms are no

longer seen as fixed and final; nothing becomes absolute. All that had fed the Victorian imagination – peace, optimism, prosperity, progress, culture, Christian morality – turn to despair, alienation, pessimism, nihilism, and what have you. Thus, Kehinde Ayo (338) adds that the modernist theme is "signified by the post-world war philosophy of existentialism which is marked by alienation, despair, cruelty, misogyny, misanthropy, betrayal, nihilism and all forms of anomie." The techniques of modernism also appear to have made literature more difficult; hence, modernism has been accused of making literature less accessible to the public, removing it from the reach of literate masses and making it the preserve of the intellectuals.

Woolf's Modernist Framework

Describing the milieu that has fed her imagination, Virginia Woolf writes:

The mind is full of monstrous unimaginable emotions ...; that human life lasts but a second; that the capacity of the human mind is nevertheless boundless; that life is infinitely adorable but disgusting; that science and religion have between them destroyed belief; that all bonds of union seem broken, yet some control must exist. It is in this atmosphere of doubt and conflict that writers have now to create. ("Granite and Rainbow" cited in *Glencoe Literature* 879)

Struck by changes in the aftermath of the First World War, Woolf saw a shift in human relations, in social and political structures, and in the entire society. She wanted to capture the changes in the world in her craft, for since literature itself is a reflection of human experience the vessel of literature also needed to reflect the milieu.

In her essay "Modern Fiction", Woolf elucidates the theory of modernist fiction in which she tries to establish the difference between her generation of British writers and their immediate predecessors. While recognizing the craftsmanship of some traditional novelists, Woolf comments that they are slaves to convention, which drives them to waste immense skill and efforts on plot and character and to have a narrow focus on external material reality. By this, she means that their works depict the human condition through gritty realism, trying to achieve verisimilitude. Giving the examples of H.G.Wells, Arnold Bennet, and John Galsworthy, she flaws what she sees as their "materialism", which she thus underlines:

If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them... the better for its soul. ("Modern Fiction")

In Woolf's opinion, the writers representing the fiction of the preceding generation miss "life or spirit, truth or reality", the "essential thing", by relying so much on a great deal of description and realistic details, dwelling on social facts, fixed psychological characteristics and material circumstances of characters. She therefore spurns such a style and argues that life, in its mimetic correlation to fiction, goes beyond what the established convention of the preceding age offers:

"the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it." She rather wants to portray more delicately the aspects of consciousness in which she believes the truth or reality of human experience lie. She then explains the task of the novelist as that of not perceiving life as "a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" but rather as that of looking within and conveying the mind as receiving "myriad impressions", as representing the "luminous halo", the "semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." She further states that life should not be seen as existing "more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small." Thus, in her conclusion, she maintains: "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss."

We can deduce that the achievement of Woolf's modernist technique represents a way of making sense of the reality of human experience in a manner that "privileges aspects of human nature previously overlooked" as Vid Simoniti (web source) rightly observes. Woolf's style then shows commitment to such overlooked aspects of human nature as the psychological interior of human consciousness, the inner reality of memory and thought associations far beyond mere external facts. She then perceives the task of fiction as that of conveying what she describes as "this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." Woolf successfully realizes such a style in *Mrs Dalloway* as shall be seen in the discussion that follows in the next section of this paper.

Mrs Dalloway: Modernist Craft and Vision

Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is no doubt a major modernist novel, which puts into practice much of the theory of modernist fiction enunciated in her essay "Modern Fiction", the kernel of which may be stated as follows: In its mimetic relationship with fiction, (i) life is not narrowly lived on the external material side alone, but also within, where "myriad impressions" impinge on the consciousness; (ii) life is not coherently, logically, or "symmetrically arranged"; and (iii) life is not about big things alone, but also about small things, hence everything is the stuff of fiction.

Mrs Dalloway is a story that abandons the continuous narrative line that runs into months or years as in the conventional traditional novel and features several characters through the course of one single day. With no central plot, the author concentrates on the world view and inner workings of Mrs Clarissa Dalloway, interpolating it with her exploration and sensory experience of the world surrounding her. This aligns with Woolf's interest in "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day," receiving "myriad impressions" laced "with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible" ("Modern Fiction"). In this novel, Woolf also dislodges temporal time lines and treats time as cyclical, moving, as L C Melton (web source) points out, "from one image to another in flutters rather than in a start to finish manner" and unfolding as it goes a juxtaposition of events all at

once. All this becomes indicative of Woolf's typical exploration of "the possibilities of moving between action and contemplation, between retrospection and anticipation, between specific external events and delicate tracings of the flow of consciousness" ("Virginia Woolf" 2081).

In the novel we see everything, all in one day in June, about the life of Clarissa Dalloway with other characters connected to her. With a heavy emphasis on the interior consciousness, the story moves back and forth in time and in and out of characters' minds. Clarissa goes around her London neighbourhood in the morning to shop for flowers for a party she is hosting later in the evening. The freshness of the morning takes her back in time to her youthful days at Bourton and makes her wonder about her choice of husband. She has married Richard Dalloway instead of Peter Walsh whom she actually has a passion for. Peter has been away in India for five years and incidentally visits her that morning as she returns with the flowers. The two characters have always criticized each other, and after this morning's meeting each wonders how things would have been if they had ended up together. Clarissa remembers Sally Seton, her friend of Bourton days for whom she has felt some homosexual attraction. The second narrative strand begins with Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran suffering from shell shock. He is visited by frequent hallucinations about his friend Evans who has died in the war. Septimus spends his day in the park with his Italian-born wife Lucrezia where Peter Walsh watches them. Lucrezia contacts a psychiatrist, Sir William Bradshaw, and later Dr Holmes about her husband's condition. But both fail in diagnosing and solving Septimus's problems. Later on the same day, Septimus commits suicide by jumping out of a window. Clarissa's party turns out a success, attended by most of the characters she is connected with, including Peter Walsh and Sally Seton. She hears about Septimus's suicide and admires his act, identifying with his choice of death as an effort to preserve the individual's happiness and also as an escape from the tragedy of living.

Using the modernist technique, Woolf presents the persona's consciousness with the external surroundings on a single day, giving us a breath of London in a day to cut across class and gender. London comes alive as an organism matched with bells, a symbol of time's flight and of mortality: the "Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First, a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable" (6). The issue of mortality is very strong in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. What does life mean after being through the war that has been so shattering and transformative? Against this background, Mrs Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of a British Member of Parliament is going to host a survival party in the evening of the day in the middle of June 1923. Echoes of the tragedy are still palpable, with instances of Mrs Foxcroft whose boy "was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin" and that of "Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar ... with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed" (6-7).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, we begin to appreciate Woolf's view that "life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" where things must happen logically, chronologically, with one leading to another. The causally related pattern of

conventional plot is totally cast off, and events in characters' lives are captured more through the mind. Past memories freely mix with the present and the future without any separation of time lines. Thus, we find at work her view that life is not as "materialistic" as her literary predecessors presented, but that life constitutes rather more of the inner "spiritual" reality, which is endowed to move in and out of time and spaces without hindrances. The human consciousness is uncontrollably infused with diverse impressions that are colliding with one another. Portraying the central character, Clarissa, struggling through a single day in time, Woolf opens our eyes to the possibilities beyond the material world. Thus, in the novel, with the technique of stream of consciousness and free association, atoms of thoughts and sensations are caught without any coherent order as they fall on the consciousness. And this poses a challenge to the reader whose regular cognitive mind has been trained on logicality. This is one of the reasons modernist literature is said to be difficult. The stream of consciousness style entails an incoherence of a sort: non-linear narration, fragmentation, combination of both direct and indirect discourse, and temporal distortion. The stream of consciousness narrative technique, which renders the flow of myriad impressions that impinge on consciousness of an individual and form part of his awareness along with the trend of his rational thoughts, becomes for Woolf that new method of fiction. The following long excerpt puts Woolf's artistic practice in clear perspective:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there.... Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. ... Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. ("Modern Fiction")

Let us see how Woolf's innovative method works in *Mrs Dalloway,* starting from the very first page:

MRS DALLOWAY said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. 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 was

then) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" – was that it? – "I prefer men to cauliflowers" – was that it/ He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace – Peter Walsh. (5)

Looking at the first three sentences above, one finds an apparent lack of connection among them, and thereafter the passage moves farther away inspired by the freshness of the morning. And at this point one is left to wonder about the undeveloped topic sentence on the subject of flowers. An instance of discontinuous narration or fragmentation, the sentences come with disjointed themes, shocking the reader with its incoherence at a first glance. Woolf pursues the mind from one idea to the other like a butterfly perching on different flowers in a garden. The reader has to follow the character's mind from flowers, to Lucy, to Rumpelmayer's men and then to the past at Bourton over some thirty years ago, connecting Clarissa's life with Peter Walsh. There is in this long excerpt a little tinge of the external surroundings with a large dose of the inner workings of the mind, as underpinned in Woolf's idea of the task of the novelist as that of conveying what goes on in the mind within "with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible" (" Modern Fiction") . As the thought flow runs, fragments of poetry merge with the prose narrative, blurring the distinction between the two literary forms as these expressions isolated from the passage shows:

What a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! ... 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 ... solemn.

Woolf employs the logic of imagination, challenging us to consider the possibilities of life beyond the material, visible, realist world. Life seems to exist more inside an individual's consciousness in contrast with what the Victorian realist fiction does. In the novel, the internal truth in a character tends to stand in contrast with the external reality. Take Septimus and Clarissa for examples. The connection between these two characters is never physical or material. They never meet nor even know about each other externally. But Clarissa connects with Septimus in her consciousness more profoundly than with any other character in the novel. Septimus suffers alone; and his problems cannot be shared or viewed externally. Dr Holmes see nothing wrong with him: "For he is not ill. Dr Holmes says, there was nothing the matter with him" (27). His hallucinations unite him spiritually with his dead friend, Evans. In the real world he is seen as a war hero; but within, he sees himself as a criminal. While he admits to crime in his mind, the real world morality credits him with heroism. Even his wife Lucrezia cannot understand what is going on inside him. His internal consciousness runs counter to the reality of the material world. Clarissa on the other hand is seen as the perfect hostess of the evening's war survival party, the happy wife of an important dignitary. Yet most of the time, her contemplation dwells on dying, highlighting the theme of aging and mortality. At fifty two, she contemplates on her aging body which is stripped of its treasures of external beauty, correlating to the loss of

the womb by the symbolic fact of its being past fertility, and therefore a condition associated with death. And the thought of Lady Bruton inviting Richard, her husband, to her extraordinarily amusing lunch party without her makes Clarissa shiver, "feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless..." Following Lady Bruton's action, we read that "she feared time itself..., the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching...." Then she muses in her attic room that "There was emptiness about the heart of life" (34-35). The death motif in Shakespeare's lines flutters from time to time in her consciousness: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/ Nor the furious winter's rages" (12). In spite of her being positive about survival, we find her ruminating: "Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?" (11). In all, Clarissa Dalloway's gentry comfort belies her disenchantment with life, leading her to dwell more on dying than on living in the belief that the physical body is an apparition that merely interrupts the spiritual life. It is this inclination towards death that strongly connects her to Septimus.

The pervasive sense of dying, as we have seen so far, accords with the modernist theme of alienation and pessimism that envisions "life as 'a fool's errand to the grave'" (William J. Long 573). Beneath a glorious party surface and cheerful appearances lies some strong sense of tragedy. Both Clarissa and Septimus are alienated, unhappy and full of pessimism. Clarissa is drawn to Septimus not by pity but by a shared belief in the meaninglessness of life. Ian Mugford (web source) rightly observes that Clarissa's consciousness of death "resonates mostly in her isolated attic bedroom", and that the image of her bedroom symbolizes loneliness and death." To Clarissa, death is more desirable than being alive. Septimus chooses death, happy to be out of life. The party is about to end and Clarissa ruminates over the news of his death, amidst colliding thoughts of her old lady neighbour living alone and of the clock striking:

The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extra-ordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself.She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. (204)

Thus, Clarissa loves life but ruminates over its termination, which presents us with the paradox of life in death or death in life. And as the Anglican funeral puts it, "In the midst of life we are in death." The death of Septimus punctuates the survival party, suggesting that life is not worth celebrating.

Woolf's innovative narrative structure reflects the post-war English society. The upper middle class are portrayed as trying to cope with the war tragedy through a survival party with stately stoicism: "This late age of world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance, a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (12).

Septimus and his wife represent the working class in their own sorrow in a dystopian malaise that has been unleashed on the world. Their story exemplifies the frustrations, nihilism, and despair of the time. Septimus, a shell shocked war veteran loses all sensation of feeling and is in a dysfunctional marriage with his wife Lucrezia, whose desires for a child is in vain because she and her husband cannot get to have sex. Their situation seems to suggest the uselessness of procreation in a meaningless world. We find black humour in the comparison of Lucrezia's sobbing to the thumping of a piston:

At tea Rezia told him that Mrs Filmer's daughter was expecting a baby. She could not grow old and have no children! She was very lovely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing (100).

Life is miserable and dark, and everything seems to be coming to an end. Gloom, despair and doom characterize the mood of the novel. Septimus carries in himthe message of the evil and anomie that has come upon the world: "Here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?" (93) His message resonates from his thoughts: "It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (98). His thoughts further go on:

For the truth is (let her ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces. (99)

Thus, in the face of human failure, life becomes worthless: and this is the basis on which Septimus throws his life away, the reason for which Clarissa identifies with and desires his choice.

Furthermore, part of the social anomie is seen in the breakdown in human relationship and communication. Peter Walsh is unable to communicate his thoughts to Clarissa, and vice versa. Marriages become mere social entrapments. Peter's love for Clarissa under normal circumstances should end in marriage, but it doesn't. The two are separated by class determined marriages. Peter courts for wife another man's wife in India; and in the marriage of Richard Dalloway and Clarissa there is only cordiality, and both are unable to communicate the truth of their thoughts or feelings for each other. They continue in a sexless marriage with Richard being invited to Lady Bruton's lunch party alone without her, quite contrary to conventional social ethics. Clarissa is lonely; much of her communication dwells in her thoughts, and her bed is getting narrower, a symbol of the grave as the ultimate destination of all flesh. More inclined to the thoughts of her lesbian interest in Sally Seton, Clarissa has indeed grown frigid with her husband as the following passage shows:

Narrower and narrower would her bed be.... Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed.... So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a

virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment... when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked.... It was something central which permeated; something which broke up surfaces and rippledthe cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. (35-36).

Very importantly, Woolf raises the issue of what qualifies as the subject of fiction. To her, the subject of fiction can be anything, whether important or trifling. Hence, she states: "Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small." And thinking of the infinite possibilities of art, she thus concludes that "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon." ("Modern Fiction") How does this proposition play out in *Mrs Dalloway*? In the first instance, Woolf challenges the orthodoxies, prudery and moral tone of the literary convention of the immediate past Victorian era that forbade and muted sex as subject. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf is vocal about sex, featuring both lesbian and homosexual relationships. Here is, for instance, one passage on the pleasures of orgasm, which the author compares to something of a religious feeling:

... she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. (36)

Homosexuality, which has hitherto been a taboo subject, is also fore-grounded through the two major characters. Septimus is repulsed at the idea of heterosexual sex and abstains from sex with his wife. He is haunted by the image of his late friend Evans who is killed at war and is said to be "undemonstrative in the company of women" and with whom Septimus has had homosexual relationship described in the novel as "two dogs playing on a hearth-rug," and who inseparable, "had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other..." ("Mrs Dalloway"). On the other hand, Clarissa revels in what now is clear to her to have been her lesbian affection for Sally Seton some thirty four years ago at Bourton. Recollecting her feelings then, she goes on to conclude that lesbian romantic affection is as pleasurable as heterosexual one: "But this question of love (she thought, pulling her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton. Had not that, after all been love?" (37).

What is more, Woolf incorporates into the novel things that are ordinarily thought small, using them to make profound statements about life. Thus, *Mrs Dalloway* is centred on an ordinary commonplace event such as giving a party by the ordinary personality of a housewife, as loudly echoed in the title of the novel.

The novel could have been simply entitled "Clarissa Dalloway" after the protagonist's name as has hitherto been the case with other works with eponymous heroine titles. But it is important for the author to underline the ordinariness of the protagonist. Elaine Showalter makes this point about the novel's title when she says that the novel is "daringly Mrs Dalloway", highlighting the common status of being a wife, a thing very specific to the issue of women's identity that is reductively subsumed in marriage (Elaine Showalter). We are brought to see how ordinary the author's choice of protagonist is: Clarissa, in terms of substance, is really not an important personality in comparison, for instance, with Lady Bexborough, who is imaged as "slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere." This is further accentuated by the fact that Clarissa's menopausal female body, conceived in the image of flowers – as drooping, dying, fading and past its bloom – is closely associated with death. Thus we read:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway. (13)

Woolf's novels are,therefore, aptly described as "highly experimental: a narrative, frequently uneventful and commonplace." Again, it is said that the "intensity of her poetic vision elevates the ordinary, sometimes banal settings – often wartime environments – of most of her novels"(Virginia Woolf," web source). We find this particularly true of *Mrs Dalloway* in which Woolf establishes the logic of the profound in ordinary trifles. With the example of the car explosion incident in the novel, we are able to see her technique of lodging the profound within what seems trifling:

Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailor's shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound. (21)

This instance of the mere sound of a car explosion goes on to evoke the profound subject of the British class system: the poor's unquestioned devotion to Royalty, their tolerance and admiration for the excessively wealthy class, and "the thought of the heavenly life divinely bestowed upon Kings; of the equerries and deep curtsies; of the Queen's old doll's house..." (22).

Conclusion

Indeed, Woolf privileges private thoughts, emphasizing the relevance of innerspeech, ofinvisible private thoughts rather than concrete events in a person's life. She succeeds in revealing the nature of the mind, conveying intimate particulars of a single human consciousness and the challenges of living in the

course of one day, and thereby underlining that a day is not fixed in the consciousness.The invisible, unvoiced thoughts and emotions in characters' lives take pride of place and dominate pages of the novel. She then captures the precarious nature of the time in the immediate aftermath of a stupendous war using the technique of the inner workings of the mind to reveal the complexities of living one day at a time. She evokes the challenges involved in the act of living through just an ordinary single day as she charges what may be seen as the mere trifle of an ordinary day with the complexities of the realities and possibilities of the inner spiritual world of consciousness, and from which profound deductions about life can be made. By this, Woolf tacitly demonstrates her modernist method as expounded in her "Modernist Fiction" against the established convention of her immediate past generation of writers, particularly the Edwardians, whom she flaws.

In the final analysis, the features of modernism, both in style and theme, are unmistakable in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, as this paper has tried to establish. As things fell apart in the "modern" world of the early twentieth century, writers responded to that experience in their artistic practices. Woolf is one such writer; and, indeed, she could never be forgotten on account of her enduring contribution to the fiction of the modernist epoch.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. and Geoffery Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 8th ed. Boston, USA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005. Print.

Alexander, Michael. *A History of English Literature* 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Ayo, Kehinde. "The Modernist Novelist and the Historical Sense: the Examples of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf," *Perspectives on Language and Literature*. Ed. Moji Olateju and Lekan Oyeleye. Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2005. Print.

Coombes, H. *English Literature Made Simple*. London: Heinemann, 1982. Print.

Glencoe Literature: British Literature Texas Edition. USA: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2000. Print.

Goring, Paul, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell. *Studying Literature: The Essential Companion*. London: Arnold, 2001. Print.

Harvey, Paul. "Woolf, Virginia." *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978. Print.

Long, William J. *English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English Speaking World*. Delhi, India: A.I.T.B.S. Publishers, 2003. Print.

Melton, L.C. "Modernism in Literature and History." Web. 12 Feb 2011. http://www.helium.com/items/809291_modernism-in-literature-and-history.

"Modernist Literature". Web. 30 Mar 2009. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernist-literature.
"Mrs Dalloway". Web. 18 Feb 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs-dalloway.
Mugford, Ian. "Virginia Woolf: Viewing Mrs Dalloway Through the Lens of Modern Fiction." Web. 10 Jan 2017. http://www.suite101.com/content/understanding-mrs- dalloway-a179094.
Showalter, Elaine. "Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway." The British Library. Web. 20 Oct 2018. www.bl.ukwww.youtube.
Simoniti, Vid. "Virginia Woolf, Literary Style and Aesthetic Education." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol 50, No.1 (Spring 2016), 62-79. Web. 19 Oct 2018. DOI:10.5406/jaesteduc.50.1.0062.
"Virginia Woolf." Web. 10 Jan 2017. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/virginia_woolf.
"Virginia Woolf." *TheNorton Anthology of Literature* 8th ed., Vol.2. Ed. Stephen Greenblaat and M.H. Abrams. New York: N.Y W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. Print.
Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." *The Common Reader*. Web. 27 July 2010. http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/chapter13.html.
---. *Mrs Dalloway*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. Print.