

Symbolism exploited in virginia woolf's mrs. dalloway



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Virginia Woolf, 20th century English novelist, successfully wrote and developed her stories with some of the most unique writing styles of the time. Through one of her most famous novels, Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf takes the use of symbolism beyond the usual. Frequently, symbolism is used to enhance or add to a story where as Woolf, on the other hand, utilizes symbolism at the forefront of character development. One of the most unique aspects is her constant use of nature as a symbol. Woolf's symbolic use of flowers, water and trees play a key role in characterization of Clarissa Dalloway, standing as one of the most dynamic figures throughout the novel. These forms of symbolic nature allow the reader to shape a deeper meaning behind the character of Mrs. Dalloway.

Woolf opens her novel with " Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (Woolf 3). Right from the start we have already developed Clarissa as a woman who strives for a sense of independence. As Clarissa enters the shop the descriptive paragraphs of flowers have already begun. The reader begins to develop her character's strong and meaningful connection to the flowers that surround her. We get the sense that they give Clarissa a sweet escape from the reality of her life. That is, her life as simply Mrs. Dalloway. They expose her to the beauty and pureness she knows still exist within the world. All of her senses are taken over by the splendor of the flowers. " She breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym..."(Woolf 12). We feel as though Clarissa is set in a field of colorful and endless magnificence. As the scene continues she reminisces on her childhood that has fell deep into her past. She thinks of herself, running free in the summer air, picking sweat peas from the ground. Free to go anywhere

as she pleased. Now, she stands confined within store bounds, picking among the options at hand. What freedom and serenity she once held. It is the flower that brings her back to life before conformity, before she became Mrs. Dalloway.

Mr. Dalloway enters his home while awkwardly handling a bouquet of roses he has bought for his wife. Clarissa takes the flowers and thanks her husband for the kind gesture. Clarissa could not help but notice his failure to say, " I love you". " She understood. She understood without his speaking; his Clarissa" (Woolf 115). Here Woolf is using the bouquet of roses to symbolize the conformity Clarissa has created within her life. His Clarissa. She is his. Marriage has taken away her pride, freedom and independence. Woolf develops the roses as a symbol of the bond created between her and her husband. As Clarissa sits, questioning the meaning of her marriage she is constantly reverting back to the roses that stand before her. "...but she loved her roses...the only flowers she could bear to see cut"(Woolf 17). When you cut a flower, you take away their freedom to grow and live. They become constricted in whatever confinement they are placed in, symbolizing how she feels towards marriage. Just like the roses, she was cut from her state of bliss and growth. They were the only flower she could manage to see cut. Roses are supposed to be cut, displayed as a symbol of beauty for other's enjoyment. Just like women are meant to be wives. They must learn to be bold and beautiful within their newfound confinement.

Water also plays a key role in the construction of Clarissa's life. There are many important scenes in the novel that occur around bodies of water.

During Peter's surprise visit, Clarissa has a hard time not thinking about what <https://assignbuster.com/symbolism-exploited-in-virginia-woolfs-mrs-dalloway/>

is she has made of her life. When reminiscing on the past she asks Peter if he remembers the lake. "...the pressure and emotion which caught her heart made her muscles of her throat stiff and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said " lake" " (Woolf 42). In this scene Woolf develops the lake as another symbol. The lake is just like Clarissa's life. Water within the lake is free to move but, within its boundaries. As a child she stood on the outside of the lake feedings the ducks with the bread her parents would hand her. They " held her life in her arms" as she played around the lake, unaware of the dangers stepping in would create. Thinking back on this time makes Clarissa feel as though she has failed to prove herself to her parents. This is what she has made of her life, conformity and confinement. She sits sewing, with Peter by her side. Performing her duties as a wife while sitting next to one of the biggest " what ifs" her life has ever set before her. She wonders if Peter was the one that got away. It wasn't until the night she was introduced to Mr. Dalloway that she was then floating around in a boat within the boundaries of the exact same lake, now constricted by the land around her. It was the night that she entered the lake that she knew she would marry Mr. Dalloway. It is almost as if her confinement within the lake with him represents her marriage as a whole. Not many places to go, not many ways to turn.

Many people believe that Virginia Woolf alludes to herself through the character of Clarissa Dalloway. It is interesting to think about how this may evolve the meaning of water into something a little more complex. Virginia Woolf took her own life by drowning herself in a body of water. Thinking back to the lake, which symbolized constriction of freedom, someone knowing Virginia Woolf's tragic end may even come to realize that she never escaped

from the confinement of the "lake" or water. It was here, that her life came to a complete and absolute end. It gives way to the unfortunate realization that Virginia Woolf ended her life within the same boundaries she had failed to escape.

Along with flowers and water, trees are another important aspect of Mrs. Dalloway that lend way to a meaningful insight into the character of Clarissa Dalloway. The frequent appearance of trees allows us to think about a deeper meaning behind this form of nature. Trees are a symbol of life for Clarissa. From the start of a tree's life it is their roots, their beginnings that are the determining factor for where it is they will grasp on to and stay fixed for the remainder of their life. Clarissa feels as though her decision to marry Mr. Dalloway has made her life stationary. As she is one with Mr. Dalloway, she must learn to grow within the life she has been rooted into. Just like Clarissa, the memories within a tree are endless, lasting forever. Within a tree's trunk, rings of memory are added on with each year, without losing distinction for even the earliest rings. Throughout the novel, Clarissa Dalloway is constantly reflecting on her rings, her memories. They are the choices she has made that place her exactly where she is today. Just like a tree, her memories never leave her. They are filled with every detail that she has held close to her for her entire life.

Water, flowers and trees stand as the foundation to the development of Clarissa Dalloway. It is out these symbolic forms of nature that a reader is forced to think of her figure on a much deeper level. Woolf is able to take very basic characteristics of the nature that surrounds us, and make some of the most complex and insightful connections to key figures such as Clarissa.

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The use of such symbolism is what successfully allows Woolf to build Mrs. Dalloway into one of the most dynamic characters throughout her novel. A reader could only imagine reading Mrs. Dalloway with the absence of such intense symbolism.