

Old mrs grey

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“ Old Mrs. Grey” Born in 1882, Virginia Woolf was an author, feminist, critic, essayist, pacifist and one of the founders of the Modernist Movement in Literature. Like many of her contemporaries in the Movement, she employed a vivid and descriptive stream-of-consciousness writing style that was rooted in the popular Freudian psychoanalytic theories of the day; and in fact, both of her brothers became psychoanalysts. Woolf regarded herself as “ mad”, having bouts of debilitating depression brought on by her bi-polar disorder. Within her body of work, especially in her essay “ Old Mrs.

Grey”, you can see the melancholic/suicidal ideation of her own psyche deployed in the character of Mrs. Grey. She did not hold with the traditional views that suicide was sinful or cowardice. In 1941, she put rocks in her coat pockets and committed suicide by drowning herself in a river near her home in Sussex. The letter she left reasoned that she was “ going mad again and shan’t recover this time”. This is the background on how and possibly why Mrs. Woolf uses the imagery of hopelessness so effectively in this story as a surrogate for her own misery.

In the story “ Old Mrs. Grey”, Woolf’s depressively artful use of words describes a lonely 92 year old woman whose body has painfully palsy, “ jerked her body to and fro”, and is in constant arthritic pain which, “ twists her legs” and keeps her confined to her home where she sits in a “ hard chair” and looks with “ aged eyes” that have “ ceased”. She sits by a dying fire in a hard chair, looking at “ The morning spread seven foot by four, green and sunny. “ a reference to the only life she knows now, looking through the door of her cottage at the life outside of it.

This is emblematic of her longing for a bygone youth, which Woolf further describes, "... (she) saw herself at ten, at twenty, at twenty-five. ", a youth which has fled and left her nothing but memories. The poignant aspect of the story is that while Mrs. Grey is confounded by her longevity, though she longs for the Lord to "take her", she never actually voices a propensity to end it herself. The author clearly feels that the advances of medical science that prolong her life, which are but a "nail...that pinions...the body against a wall", are an insult and occur seemingly against her will.

However, as the protagonist notes, the doctor is a good man. The author implies that the doctor is in wonder that Mrs. Grey hasn't died, but clearly shows that he takes care of her, as required by his oath, regardless of his personal opinion. Clearly, Woolf's use of imagery and diction brings the reader into Mrs. Grey's end of life suffering and morose loneliness. The reader, by the end of the story, can empathize with Mrs. Grey's feeling of the pointlessness and uselessness of her remaining days and her longing to "pass on", because of Woolf's competent characterization of Mrs. Grey's somber situation.