

Mrs dalloway and her parties. the meaning of her parties in the novel: mrs dallow...

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“ Mrs. Dalloway and Peter Walsh – A Missed Chance of Happiness?” Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf is an engaging story based on one day in the life of Mrs. Richard Dalloway, more commonly known as Clarissa in her youthful days. Amongst the prominent characters in the novel who have been a part of Clarissa’s love life at some point in the novel are Mr. Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh and Sally Seaton. Richard Dalloway is Clarissa’s husband and a rich Member of the Parliament, Peter Walsh is Clarissa’s old friend who deeply admired her and whose marriage proposal she had turned down in favor of Richard Dalloway. Another old friend of Clarissa is Sally Seaton their relationship, as portrayed in the novel is suggestive of a mutual homosexual interest shared between the two. Two questions, which keep pestering the reader throughout the novel, are whether Clarissa Dalloway is happy with her life and could she have been happier with Peter Walsh? The answer to the latter, in my view does not speak in favor of Peter Walsh for reasons that will follow.

It is indeed clear in the novel that Clarissa was never madly in love with Richard Dalloway but rather thought him to be a sensible match for her with his wealth and status in the society (McNichol, 74). The question of Clarissa’s happiness is an interesting one. One could hardly say she is happy with Richard. The frequent reflections of her past which keep reminding her of the moments she would always cherish and her spending the entire day thinking about them does reflect on the fact that even after years of marriage Clarissa is strongly attached to her past. In fact, it appears that Clarissa is more in contact with her past than she is with her daughter – a strange predicament indeed. Consequently, the happiness, which one seeks in one’s

life, does not appear to be present in Clarissa's. The contentment, which one desires after years of marriage and a sense of fulfillment, does not seem to exist in Clarissa's case. This does not mean, in any way that she has spent an unhappy life with Richard Dalloway but only points towards whether she could have spent a happier life with Peter Walsh.

When Clarissa made the choice of marrying Richard Dalloway and not Peter Walsh, the reasons, which commanded her decision, were deeply rooted in the contrast of personalities between Peter Walsh and Clarissa herself.

Clarissa wanted the leverage of not being bound to her husband in every respect of her life. On the contrary, as stated in the novel " But with Peter everything had to be shared," (Woolf, 16). No matter how similar Peter and Clarissa were, they were still vastly different in some of the most important relational aspects of life. Their expectations from each other were very different. It is true, that Clarissa never married Richard out of love, as also pointed out by Sally Seaton towards the end of the novel. Even after so many years, it appears that both Clarissa and Peter share feelings for each other (Zunshine, 3-5). If love had been her primary motivator, then Clarissa would have given precedence to Peter Walsh over Richard, but it was her expectation of a life with Peter Walsh that made her reject his proposal. We all rave about love and how marriages should be based on love but the truth is that love alone is not responsible for a happy marriage. Had Clarissa married Peter Walsh, they might have been happy together but only fleetingly. With the passage of time Clarissa would have been weary of the binding clutches of her relationship with Peter which would increasingly have suffocated her and chances are that her marriage with Peter Walsh would

not have lasted for so long, the way it did with Richard Dalloway.

Clarissa might not be very happy with her life with Richard, yet she has a certain peace of mind regarding the fact that her reasons for making the choice materialized just as she predicted them. Richard had a good reputation in the society, which also provided Clarissa with a strong position in the society. Her parties, which mattered so much to her, were graced by the most notable personalities and she enjoyed playing the hostess, which was something Peter could not relate to. Peter does not see eye to eye with Clarissa's love for her parties, rather he saw it as a very shallow interest for someone of Clarissa's character (Ingman, 131). After returning from India and meeting Clarissa, Peter Walsh felt that marriage with Richard had left the development of Clarissa's character in its rudimentary stages which was a pity since he felt that marriage with Peter Walsh would have developed her strength of character. This throws light on the fact that Peter Walsh was a proud man, he felt he was exalted in status from the rest of the society because he possessed a depth of character. It is therefore a possibility that marriage with Peter Walsh would have resulted in his reminding Clarissa of how fickle she was compared to him.

A person must be living in a fantasy world to think of marriage as an ideal relationship that demands no compromises and can be lived through simply on the basis of love. Clarissa realized the meaning of the choices present in front of her. Marriage with Richard as opposed to Peter Walsh was a trade off between love, social security and to some extent the retention of her individuality for Clarissa. With Richard she had the liberty to live her life without being answerable to someone at every step she took, which was

more important to Clarissa than a passion she felt towards Peter Walsh. Peter Walsh was a misfit in the society and Clarissa could not imagine her existence without the society (Woolf and Bradshaw, 21). For two people who differed so significantly in their personalities and preferences regarding the way they wanted to live their lives, happiness does not seem to be an obvious outcome of living together.

#### Works Cited

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