

CHAPTER III

THE BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

THE AUTHOR

III.1. The Life of Virginia Woolf

Adeline Virginia Stephen was born on 25 January 1882, the third child and second daughter of Leslie and Julia Stephen. She had an older sister and brother, Vanessa and Thoby, and her younger brother named Adrian. Since both of her parents had been married before, she also lived with her father's daughter from the first marriage, Laura, and her mother's children George, Stella, and Gerald Duckworth.

Virginia Stephen, later known as Virginia Woolf, was born into a late - Victorian, upper-middle-class family. She grew up in a literary atmosphere and through her father, Woolf was linked with literary talent. He at first directed her eagerness for reading with careful choices. In her middle teens she had an exceptional freedom for a girl in Victorian times to have a free run of the library, and it gave her a

great benefit for her writing life in the future. Besides being taught herself, Woolf was also had her private lessons in Latin and Greek (Lehmann 8-9).

Woolf experienced certain breakdowns during her lifetime. The first great crisis was the death of the mother in 1895. Virginia was only thirteen years old when she lost her mother's great and deep affection. She considered the death of her mother as "the greatest disaster that could happen". The death of Woolf's mother caused the deepest depression and self-accusation. Woolf presented her memory of the mother in her novel entitled *To the Lighthouse*.

Two years after Julia's death, when she was able to recovered, in July 1897 she had to face with the second trauma created by the death of her sister, Stella. Virginia's illness was a repetition and it got worse when she reached the horrifying scale she suffered in 1904; it was the time of Sir Leslie's death. Virginia had a far more alarming breakdown, which one could not call anything but madness. This third breakdown started slowly with headaches and bewildered irritations, then the deeper nightmare developed in which she's tortured by self-accusation and guilt about her father. She was being taken care by three nurses who turned out to be her enemies. Her depression led to her attempt to commit suicide by throwing herself out of a window (Lehmann 14).

During her mental breakdown, she was greatly helped by Violet Dickinson, the devoted care of an older woman friend. Virginia fallen in love with this lady. It was the second time that she shared the love to a person of her own sex (the first time was with Madge Vaughan). Her tendency to love a woman was due to the emotional

traumas caused by her half-brother, George, who'd seduced her. This aspect of Woolf's life reflected in the relationships between Clarissa Dalloway and her best friend named Sally Seton, and also between Elizabeth Dalloway and Miss Kilman; the characters in her novel entitled *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Another breakdown of Virginia Woolf was at the time of Thoby's death. It was a shocking thing that she never entirely recovered. Her novel entitled *The Waves* was a dedication to the memory of the brother.

Her moving to Fitzroy Square after her brother's death had made her gained self-confidence. She started to love the society because basically she liked people, liked lively and friendly conversations, and was intensely curious about people she met. This love of society can be seen in the character of Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

In 1909 a tragic thing happened and it was a very painful moment for Virginia. She accepted the proposal of a man named Lytton Strachey, but soon afterwards they were separated. It was because she realized that Strachey had the homosexual tendency. She met another man, Leonard Woolf, and they were married on 10 August 1912.

During 1913-1915 was her breakdown and depressive phase. She refused to eat and she was being overwhelmingly oppressed by feelings of guilt and despair, to a state of the wildest over-excitement, violent with her four nurses, and talking

incessantly for several days. In September 1913, when she was alone, she took an overdose of veronal. Luckily Leonard rescued her.

It appeared likely that Leonard did not know when he married Virginia how her mental instability was. She was suffering from a deep, almost certainly congenital, manic-depressive condition, beyond the understanding of most doctors of the time, and outside the range of psychoanalytical treatment. Leonard's opinion about his wife was that his wife's breakdowns were not simply more acute examples of other people's nervous collapses, but she could be said as entering the state of insanity. She suffered from a deep depression beyond the understanding of the doctors (Lehmann 35). Virginia Woolf expressed the memory and experience of her "madness" in the character of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Woolf's life slowly began to get better since the improving of her mental health. She was recovered and could live rather normal. But soon after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, while she was working intensively on *To the Lighthouse*, in the summer of 1925, she had a serious collapse that caused by her continuous work and too many social activities. Her low state of health continued all during the rest of that year until the early months of 1926.

In October 1928 she was able to gain her strength that made it possible for her to give two lectures in Cambridge colleges. Her condition started to get better and she wrote her novels. Only sometimes she suffered from the headaches and it usually

came at the time of her writing; when she felt the tension to finish a story. Virginia always got too excited in starting her novels but felt very depressed in finishing it.

At the end of January 1941 Leonard had been sufficiently alarmed about her mental state. Virginia got better but the improvement did not last. She felt the symptoms of madness rising in her mind again. She carried out the plan that had long been in her mind for such a crisis (Lehmann 14). She wrote farewell letters to Leonard and Vanessa, filled her pockets with stones and went out and drowned herself in the River Ouse. Her body was not recovered for three weeks. It was the end of her life.

III.2. The Work of Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's literary career began with her articles and reviews. She kept up this activities during her long association with Sir Bruce Richmond, the editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*. She also wrote for many publishers and increasingly her reputation grew.

The titles of Woolf's works consist of her short stories (*Kew Garden, Monday or Tuesday*), essays (*The Common Reader*), reviews, articles (*Modern Fiction, Mr.*

Bennett and Mrs. Brown, The Russian Point of View), biography (biography of Roger Fry published on July 1940, entitled *Roger Fry, a Biography*).

In 1915 she began to write diary, entitled *A Writer's Diary*, which she kept with brief intervals until her death in 1941. Woolf's critics published in 1932 entitled *Letter to a Young Poet*. After the death of Virginia Woolf, Leonard collected and published her writings: *The Death of the Moth, The Moment, The Captain's Death Bed*, and *Granite and Rainbow*.

Among her works, Virginia Woolf is well-known for her novels. As many of her readers have already known that Woolf's life and work are two aspects that cannot easily be separated.

The Voyage Out that published in 1915 was Virginia Woolf's first novel. It followed with *Night and Day* in 1919. The first novel leaves the readers with the sense of many questions about human life and society posed. *Night and Day* is a leisurely and readable novel that it could not be traced that the author has recently came out of an appalling bout of madness (Lehmann 45).

In 1920-1921 Virginia worked on *Jacob's Room* and it was published in 1922. It is a story that has no plot and all the changing of place or time has been abolished. She starts to apply the *stream-of-consciousness* technique.

It took two years, from 1922-1924, for Woolf to write her next novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. This novel shows her use of *stream-of-consciousness* that builds up the character as real persons with astonishing skill. The interesting part of the novel is the design; the weaving together of two entirely separate threads of narrative. *Mrs. Dalloway* abounds in the most profound poetic images, often of great beauty, often terror, which emerge with ease and naturalness from the rapid flow of the narrative (Lehmann 52).

The phase of Virginia Woolf's life behind this novel was the years following her mother's death. During that period she suffered from bouts of severe mental breakdown, and also from her half brother efforts to launch her into society (McNichol 9). There are some aspects of Woolf's life presented in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf and her husband have decided not to have children, and she writes it in *Mrs. Dalloway*. She writes about the same decision made by Clarissa and her husband. Leonard Woolf's worry about her condition is just like the character of Richard who worries about Clarissa. Clarissa's love of society is a representations of Woolf's. Clarissa's recalling her childhood and youth at Bourton is the reflection of Woolf's childhood in St. Ives.

Mrs. Dalloway was published in 1925 and Woolf began to write *To the Lighthouse*. In this novel she does not write its plot, only the slightest of stories round which to crystallize her total vision. *To the Lighthouse* is a novel that explores the secret movements of the mind and the role of the author.

After finishing *To the Lighthouse* she wrote two books entitled *Orlando* (1928) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf presents her fantasy and her need of fun in *Orlando* that makes it easy to read. The second novel is a story of a polemic on the inferior status of women that has persisted in European civilization from the earliest times to the present day.

The Waves (1931), her next novel, is a story of a picture of the whole of life from the earliest dawning of sensation to the end. The next novels are *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941). *The Years* is more conventional in technique, but *Between the Acts* is the most "poetic" of all Virginia Woolf's novels and represents her final attempt to find an adequate form for her subtle and fleeting insights. *Three Guineas* is in a sense a sequel to *A Room of One's Own*.

All of her works has made Virginia Woolf one of the great of English writers. There are many critics, analysis, and interpretations of both her works and her life background.