

<p>COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF’S ESSAYS AND THEIR APPLICATION TO <i>MRS. DALLOWAY AND THE GREAT GATSBY</i></p>		<p>Twentieth Century and Contemporary Literature</p> <p>Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Modernism, Stream of Consciousness, Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown, Modern Fiction, Mrs. Dalloway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, Time and Memory, Alienation and Disillusionment, Character Representation, Comparative Literature, etc.</p>
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This essay presents a comparative analysis of Virginia Woolf’s critical essays <i>Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown</i> (1923) and <i>Modern Fiction</i> (1919) by examining their theoretical application to two major modernist novels of the early twentieth century: Virginia Woolf’s <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> (1925) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925). The reflective essay explores how Woolf’s essays mark a decisive break from traditional Edwardian literary conventions, calling for a new artistic form that captures the inner life of characters and the fluidity of time. Through Woolf’s argument that fiction should represent consciousness rather than external reality, the essay highlights the transition from traditional narrative structures to modernist experimentation, reflecting the intellectual, social, and emotional transformations of the post–World War I era. By applying Woolf’s theoretical principles to <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>, the essay illustrates how the novel’s stream-of-consciousness technique, psychological depth, and nonlinear temporality portray the complexity of human identity and memory. In parallel, Fitzgerald’s <i>The Great Gatsby</i> is analysed as a complementary modernist text which, while grounded in the American context, expresses similar concerns with time, disillusionment, and alienation. Both novels depict societies in transition, British and American, in which characters grapple with the collapse of traditional values and the search for meaning in a fragmented modern world. By connecting Woolf’s modernist vision to Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the American Dream, the research underscores how modern literature moves from tradition to contemporary sensibility, emphasizing individual perception over collective convention. The comparative perspective demonstrates that modernist fiction, whether in England or the United States, serves as a universal language that articulates human consciousness, social decay, and the persistent struggle for authenticity.</p>		

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown is an essay written by Virginia Woolf in 1923. This essay, along with another essay entitled “*Modern Fiction*,” has at least two things in common. First, both deal with representation, particularly the portrayal of characters. Second, they almost always discuss the issue in relation to Edwardian writers’ literary practices. Virginia Woolf often frames her theoretical stance in opposition to the generation of novelists who came right before her own. This essay is a polemical response to Arnold Bennet’s assertions that the novel is in crisis because Georgian novelists have failed to master the art of character-making, which is believed to be essential to crafting a successful novel (Stevic, 2017). Through this essay, Virginia Woolf explores time and the individual. Woolf contends that time is a creation of memories and expectations of the future, rather than a sequence of events that happen one after the other. The future becomes present before it even occurs, because the past is the present to memory. In other words, it can be concluded that the past, present, and the future are all intertwined in human lives. In addition, Woolf stated that: “there are no years anymore – years are merely divisions of any imaginary continuum.” (Woolf, 1924)

Woolf highlights the inextricable link between the self and the time, and even though the body will eventually dissolve, the self's consistency lies in time or in a sense of continuity. In the second chapter, plot and the necessity of writing is concerned, which does not concentrate on the rearranging of a series of events that are the primary concerns. According to Woolf, it was necessary to depart from the conventional plots, which entailed immersing oneself in the fulfilling conclusion of an effort or event, she also believes that novels can serve as a means of shedding light on human experiences that are inexplicable. She adds that the reader is more affected by a character's experience than by the dependent storyline, since it makes them want to learn more about the character's existence. Woolf also highlights novels have a less structures sequence than *The Pilgrim's Progress* and bases her arguments on story, and plot inside a book's narrative. Woolf commends the novelist for simply being able to write, showcasing the capacity to construct these analogies throughout all human existence and produce a perspective on the lives of others, who do not struggle with emotions. (Brodowicz, 2024)

Modern Fiction – an essay written by Virginia Woolf, published in 1919. It is impossible to talk about modern fiction, without mentioning the isolation. This is because at the beginning of the 20th century, there were some major changes throughout the world. Modernism was gaining traction, and technology significantly influenced people's lifestyles. Rather than residing in small towns and villages, individuals were relocating to urban areas in pursuit of employment. This era was marked by significant turmoil and disorder, featuring two world wars. All these transformations resulted in individuals feeling estranged from one another and their surroundings, causing a sense of alienation and solitude. We as readers, we have to observe that the characters in contemporary literature, ultimately control their own destiny and development, which is invigorating. (Brodowicz, 2024)

This essay represents a bold shift. It features elements whose themes and characters reflect the truths of contemporary society. The evolution of modern fiction has been influenced by historical events, cultural movements, and technological developments. These elements have really transformed the way we narrate and engage with stories. (Woolf, 1919) Contemporary narratives are fundamentally built around social issues, like: *identity, race, gender, and class*. *Modern Fiction* – tends to be more psychological and disjointed in essence, because it also incorporates innovative frameworks that challenge traditional storytelling. Through this essay written by Virginia Woolf – we can understand that it additionally aids we to think critically about our surrounding environment. Which means *Modern Fiction*, the essay written by Virginia Woolf – helps us to broaden our literary perspectives. (Rishit, 2024)

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF: *MRS. DALLOWAY AND THE GREAT GATSBY*

Mrs. Dalloway, a novel written by Virginia Woolf, published in 1925. All the action of this novel takes place in London during one day and night in June, 1923. Clarissa Dalloway is an upper-class housewife married to Richard, a politician in the Conservative Party. Clarissa gets prepared for the party she will host the evening. In the morning, she walks around London on her way to get flowers. She enjoys the small sensations of daily life and often muses on her late teenage years at Bourton, her family's country home. She passes a car bearing an unknown but important personage. Clarissa returns home from flower shopping, and is visited by Peter Walsh – an old friend from Bourton, who has been in India for many years. Peter was once passionately in love with Clarissa, but she rejected his offer of marriage. Peter and Clarissa have always been close, but also very critical each-other, and their meeting comes with many memories along. Peter leaves when Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth enters, and he walks to Regent's Park, thinking about Clarissa's refusal of his marriage offer. While he is walking in the park, he follows a young woman, idealizing her from afar. The point of view shifts to Septimus Warren Smith – a veteran of World War I, who suffers from shell shock. Septimus and his Italian wife, Lucrezia, pass time in Regent's Park. They are waiting for Septimus's appointment with Sir William Bradshaw, a psychiatrist. Septimus once was an aspiring poet, who loved Shakespeare, but after the war, he became numb to the horrors of war, unable to feel, especially he became so sad when his friend Evans died. He believes that his lack of emotion is a crime for which the world has punished him to death, and he is often suicidal. Lucrezia has been taking Septimus to Dr. Holmes, who is convinced that Septimus has nothing wrong with him and is in a funk. That afternoon the Smiths visits Sir William Bradshaw – a famous doctor, where Williams agrees to separate Septimus from Lucrezia and send him to a mental institution in the country. (Woolf, 1922)

Richard Dalloway – eats lunch with Lady Bruton, a descendant of famous generals, and Hugh Whitbread, a shallow but charming aristocrat. The two men help Lady Bruton to write a letter to the Times, London's largest newspaper, about emigration. After lunch, Richard returns home to Clarissa with a large bunch of roses, planning to tell her that he loves her, but when he sees her, he finds that he cannot say it out. Clarissa considers the privacy of the soul and the gulf that exists between even a husband and a wife. Richard leaves, and Elizabeth meets with her history teacher Miss Kilman, who are going shopping. Miss Kilman is poor, unattractive, who has been trying to convert Elizabeth to Christianity. Miss Kilman and Clarissa hate each other and are jealous of the other's influence on Elizabeth. Meanwhile, Septimus and Lucrezia are in their apartment, enjoying the moments of happiness together. Then Dr. Holmes arrives to visit Septimus, since he fears the doctor that he will destroy his soul, he jumps from a window to his death. Peter hears the ambulance go by to pick up Septimus's body and marvels ironically as it is a symbol of English civilization. After the suicide incident, he goes to Clarissa's party, where most of the novel's major characters are assembled. Clarissa acts as a perfect hostess, while she is worried that the party will fail, and she is aware of Peter's silent criticism. Sally Seton, a woman Clarissa had loved

passionately as a teen at Bourton, arrives unexpectedly. The once-radical Sally has married a rich man. The Prime Minister visits briefly, but his appearance is anticlimactic. Sir William Bradshaw arrives late, and his wife explains that Septimus has committed suicide. Clarissa retreats to the privacy of a small room to consider Septimus's death. She shows love about the purity of his soul and considers her own often shallow existence. She sees Septimus's suicide as an act of communication. Peter and Sally are waiting for Clarissa to join them. Clarissa finally appears and Peter is filled with ecstasy and excitement, whereas Clarissa is surprisingly disappointed for the success of her party. (Woolf, 1922)

The Great Gatsby – written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, published in 1925, during the Roaring Twenties, a period of economic prosperity and social changes in the United States. The story follows Nick Carraway's life and takes place in the made-up Long Island town of West Egg in the summer of 1922. The narrator, Nick, gets involved in the lives of his enigmatic neighbour, Jay Gatsby, and his cousin, Daisy Buchanan. Mysterious and rich, Gatsby is well-known for his lavish parties and his unfulfilled love for Daisy. With Gatsby's quest for love and success acting as a metaphor for the illusive and frequently unachievable character of the American Dream, the novel examines topics of money and class. (Fitzgerald, 1925)

The narrative, which is rich in symbolism, examines the moral and societal deterioration that lies beneath the glitz and glamour of the Jazz Age. *Fitzgerald delivers a critique of the American society of his period through his depiction of the excesses and moral decay of the time. As a critique of the American Dream's corruption and the quest for money, The Great Gatsby is still relevant today.* Notable movie adaptations include the 2013 version starring Leonardo DiCaprio and the 1974 version starring Robert Redford as Gatsby. These adaptations have added to Fitzgerald's masterpiece's ongoing appeal and cultural influence, as have the countless memes sparked by the 2013 edition. (Fitzgerald, 1925)

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, these two novels are great examples of modernist literature, because in the *Mrs. Dalloway*, there is a great art, that teaches us many important things, like the stream of consciousness. In *The Great Gatsby*, we have the key factors that are represented, such as, memory, time, social class, that amidst turmoil within the social hierarchy.

LITERARY ANALYSIS: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ESSAYS

In the essay *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*, Woolf argues that literary conventions should change as society does, and proposes that literary Modernism is a means to represent in the changing condition of individual and society in the early 20th century. Mr. Bennet deserves to be taken into consideration, since he has made us believe in some superhuman ability that he had when he was young. Mrs. Brown, a character she created to symbolise people, particularly single

and childless women, who are not connected to male or who are influenced by their surroundings. In a way, Mrs. Brown lives inside of us every day in every word and gesture, concealed behind the ears. Additionally, Mrs. Brown represents Woolf's call for consciousness, because what matters is not the life that one gaze, no matter how intense, may reveal. (Brodowicz, 2024)

In the essay *Modern Fiction* – Woolf makes the case that modern fiction should focus on characters' inner thoughts and consciousness and that character development should come before plot. Each individual experiences life, experiencing things as if via an imperceptible barrier that is impossible to breach. It is refreshing for us as readers to realise that characters in contemporary literature ultimately control their own destiny and development. Characters in the stories that I have read, have the choice to either embrace a more genuine self and a meaningful life, or they can give in to despair. (Brodowicz, 2024)

According to the author Mishail Sharma in her essay: "*Virginia Woolf's Modern Fiction – A Paradigm*" – she states that: "*In order to convey the essence of life, Woolf urges writers to explore the complexities of cognition and emotions, where examines the psychology and consciousness of their character, and try out different storytelling strategies.*" In Virginia Woolf's books, essays, we find that the author appears to be bound, not by his own free will, but by a strong and dishonest ruler who has him under the influence. Woolf urges writers to use a creative storytelling technique, stressing the significance of encapsulating the complexity and unpredictability of the contemporary world. This is basically her call for writers to break free from the symbolic bonds of traditional narrative patterns and embrace a more independent, creative, and free-spirited approach to contemporary literature. (Sharma, 2023)

APPLICATION TO MRS. DALLOWAY

In this paragraph, the author discusses the main arguments in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, considering the characters and the structure of the novel. Based on what has been read, the author points out a personal interpretation of the novel. The entire event in the novel unfolds over one day and night in 1923, in London, employing a style of continuous narration. The narrative explores Clarissa's mind, presenting her thoughts and experiencing her inner fragmentation. At the same time, another storyline unfolds featuring Septimus Warren Smith, an individual who is unfamiliar to Mrs. Dalloway and who later takes his own life in the narrative. When Virginia Woolf employs her distinctive narrative style known as Stream of Consciousness to convey the essence of a character's internal reflections and the flow of human thought, her approach is characterized by literary devices, a type of resource that offers insights into various components that may exist in a story. Woolf centers her ongoing narrative on the characters' everyday existence, shifting between emotions of humor and tension. Woolf also includes the initial key elements of the act, which consist of the characters' emotions and thoughts. Her narratives consistently captivate readers in the realm of psychology and human conduct. (Woolf, 1922)

COMPARISON WITH *THE GREAT GATSBY*

Both novels were released in 1925 and originate from the same post World War I, as they both address similar societal issues relevant to the time in which these novels are situated. *The Great Gatsby* focuses on the American Dream, whereas *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates the deterioration of the British Empire. Woolf reveals the inner thoughts of the characters, enabling the reader to see how their war-related thoughts hindered their ability to move forward from the impacts of post-war life. The upper class in *Mrs. Dalloway* was losing societal significance because of the war's impact, resulting in both physical disarray in Britain and a shift in the values of traditional imperial England. In *The Great Gatsby*, the wealth elite go to great lengths to maintain their high social class status, even amidst turmoil within the social hierarchy. An instance of this in *The Great Gatsby* occurs when Tom and Daisy Buchanan depart just prior to Gatsby's death. (Mrs. Dalloway Comparison, 2018)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

The two novels examine time and its impact on human experience in diverse ways. *The Great Gatsby* was published in April 1925, while *Mrs. Dalloway* followed in May of that same year. It is clear that despite being written in different countries, these two novels originate from the same time, Post-World War I, and therefore address similar themes and motifs. For example, the idea of alienation is present in both novels. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, characters such as Clarissa and Septimus grapple with an internal conflict while being unable to express their feelings and ideas to others. In *The Great Gatsby*, the characters repeatedly struggle to connect with each-other. The reason for this alienation – in both pieces results in a different theme, which is disillusionment. The characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* represent their nation collectively as they encounter disappointment with the British Empire. Similarly, *The Great Gatsby* addresses the disillusionment of the American Dream. Both novels question the notion of a fixed or unbiased reality. In *Mrs. Dalloway* – reality is dynamic, everything shifts based on the perceptions and memories of every character. Indeed, the portrayal of reality in *The Great Gatsby* is quite warped due to Gatsby's intense fixation on a haunting ideal of what transpired. The voice of the novel questions the trustworthiness of external appearances and emphasizes the persona, subjective aspect of truth. (A Thematic Comparison of Mrs. Dalloway to The Great Gatsby, 2013)

CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf's essays – provide a unique perspective for interpretation and comparing *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby*. In both novels, the most recognisable elements are the idea of alienation and disillusionment. Woolf in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the fragmented but at the same time fluid nature of time and the connection of perception and reality across individuals and different social spheres. Virginia Woolf employs her distinctive narrative style known as *Stream of Consciousness*, in order to convey the essence of character's internal reflections and the

flow of human thought. Her narrative consistently captivated readers in the realm of psychology and human conduct. *The Great Gatsby* focuses on social criticism and outside events, and generally in this novel the idea of time and memory, is addressed, ensuring in one way Woolf's modernism. In *The Great Gatsby*, the wealth elite go to great lengths in order to maintain their high social class status, even amidst turmoil within the social hierarchy. An instance of this is when Tom and Daisy Buchanan depart just prior to Gatsby's death. While in the novel *The Great Gatsby* it is seen the American Dream which is ultimately unattainable, as a critique of the corruption of the American dream and the pursuit of money, the novel *The Great Gatsby* is still relevant today.

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