

The Psychological Effects of Depression in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway

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ABSTRACT: This research explores the psychological dimensions and personality development of the main characters in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway using a literary psychological approach grounded in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The study focuses on Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, examining how their inner experiences reflect the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego. Clarissa's outwardly composed and socially acceptable persona conceals deeper emotional conflicts and existential concerns, while Septimus embodies the psychological trauma of war, expressed through hallucinations and emotional breakdown. The analysis reveals how societal expectations, personal experiences, and mental health challenges shape each character's identity and behavior. Through this lens, Mrs. Dalloway is shown to be a rich narrative of emotional struggle and psychological depth, offering insight into the complex interplay between individual psyche and social reality.

KEY WORDS: Depression, Literature, Psychoanalytic Theory, Trauma.

INTRODUCTION

All humans living in the world need language to interact with each other. Language is used by humans to convey thoughts, feelings, ideas and ideas that are poured into the mind. Language as a tool of social control because it can be used to influence the behavior and actions of others. According to Bartens (2001:27) said that literature such as poetry, novels, and even short stories, is considered very important for people to find the best things to think and speak. In literature, writers exploit the potential of language to convey their ideas for certain purposes or implied messages. Thus, language is an important element for literature.

Plato said literature as "mimesis" emphasizes that literature is an imitation or depiction of reality. He argues that literary works should reflect reality and be a model for everyday human life. In this context, literature is not only considered as entertainment, but also as a tool to understand and reflect on life and the universe. (Plato,2008)

This view shows the close relationship between literature, morality, and the reality of life. Literature often provokes thinking about identity and personal experience, helping students understand themselves and their place in society. Through characters and stories in literature, students can relate to the experiences of others, develop empathy, and increase social awareness.

The psychology of the author shapes the creation of the work, while the characters' psychology reflects different human behaviors and emotions. Additionally, the psychology of the reader plays a crucial role in how literature is perceived and appreciated. Popular works generally focus on the psychology of the reader to attract wider attention. In contrast, superior literary works present a deeper approach, considering not only the reader's experience but also the author's intentions and purposes and the complexity of the characters within. This layered psychological approach enriches the way we better understand and interpret a literary work.

Psychology is closely related to human behavior because this science focuses on understanding how humans think, feel, and act. Studying what drives humans to do certain actions, be it basic needs, desires, or life goals and analyzing how feelings affect human behavior, including how positive or negative emotions can change reactions and decisions. Early identification of psychological illness is essential to maintaining mental health. By recognizing early signs of psychological problems, individuals can better understand themselves and can develop and explore better coping skills.

Psychology and literature are deeply interconnected, as both explore human experiences as individuals and within society. They share a common foundation, focusing on human experiences as subjects of study. When linked to psychology, literature provides a compelling area of investigation because it encompasses the personalities of both the authors and their fictional characters. By examining psychology, one can gain insights into the minds of the authors and the characters they portray.

Literary works are present in society as a result of the author's thoughts and a reflection of social matters around him. Therefore, literary works are part of the lives of the audience. The author is someone who tries to provide a view of the world of his subjects (Rahman, 2018; Barabari & Moharamzadeh, 2020; Asha et al., 2025). Poetry, drama and prose are three parts of literary works.



The authors can use language in producing literary works (Rahman & Weda, 2018; Suma et al., 2023).

According to Watt (1957) the novel is a form of prose fiction that allows for a deeper exploration of character and human experience than other literary forms. novels explore human experiences, relationships between characters, and specific social or cultural contexts. Through its various intrinsic and extrinsic elements, novels are able to convey ideas, emotions, and values, and provide readers with deep insight into the lives and psychology of the characters. According to Abrams (in Nurgiyantoro, 2018:247), story characters are individuals who appear in narrative or dramatic works, who are considered by readers to have certain moral traits and tendencies, as reflected in their speech and actions.

One of the literary works that can be analyzed through the approach of literary psychology and the personality aspects of its characters is the novel entitled *Mrs. Dalloway*, by the famous writer Virginia Woolfs. Mrs Dalloway is a novel written by Virginia Woolfs, published in on May 14, 1925 and the initial title of Mrs Dalloway was The Hours. This novel originated from two short stories, namely "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and "The Prime Minister" which were unfinished. In the autumn of 1922, Woolf began to see the short story "Mrs Dalloway" as the first chapter of her new novel, and her completed the manuscript in the late autumn of 1924.

Based on the explanation, the researcher wants to reveal the condition of the characters and themes depicted by Virginia Woolfs in Mrs. Dalloway. Therefore, the researcher wants to explore how the characters and themes are depicted at that time. Through this literary psychology approach, it aims to solve the problems faced, especially those concerning aspects of the personality of the characters who are the focus of the study. reflection of personality through patterns or behavior, thoughts and attitudes inherent in a person.

This research aims to reveal the personality aspects of the main characters in Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway. It also seeks to explain the factors that shape these personality traits from the perspective of literary psychology. By analyzing the characters through a psychological lens, the study intends to provide deeper insight into their inner lives, motivations, and emotional complexities as portrayed in the narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several previous studies that serve as references for this research. The first study by Ghalandari and Jamili (2014), titled *Mental Illness and Manic-Depressive Illness in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway*, explores how Woolf's own psychological struggles, particularly bipolar disorder, are reflected in her novel. It focuses on the mental illness of characters, especially Septimus, and argues that the English patriarchal system contributes to their psychological breakdown. The second study by Ali Hussein (2021) analyzes *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Return of the Soldier* through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on war trauma and its effects on the characters. Both studies emphasize external psychological pressures such as war and mental illness.

In contrast, my research focuses on uncovering the personality aspects of the main characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the factors shaping these traits from a literary psychology perspective. Rather than emphasizing trauma or mental illness, my study aims to explore how characters' personalities are formed and expressed within the narrative, offering a broader psychological character analysis.

1. Psychological Effects by Freud (1923)

The psychological effects based on the ego and id, as proposed by Sigmund Freud in his structural model of the psyche, highlight the internal conflicts that influence human behavior and mental health. The *id* represents the primal, unconscious part of the mind driven by instincts, desires, and the pleasure principle—it seeks immediate gratification without considering consequences. In contrast, the *ego* operates on the reality principle, acting as a mediator between the impulsive demands of the *id* and the constraints of the external world. When the *id*'s desires become too strong or repressed by the *ego*, psychological tension can arise, leading to anxiety, internal conflict, or even defense mechanisms like denial, repression, or projection. If the *ego* struggles to maintain balance between the *id* and societal expectations (often reinforced by the *superego*), individuals may experience stress, guilt, or irrational behavior. Thus, the constant negotiation between the *ego* and the *id* significantly shapes one's emotions, decision-making, and overall mental state.

2. Related Studies

The first research was conducted by Seyedeh Sara Ahou Ghalandari and Leila Baradaran Jamili (2014), titled *Mental Illness and Manic-Depressive Illness in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway*. This study focuses on the distinct nature of Woolf's mental illness



as analyzed through the lens of Thomas C. Caramango (1946), highlighting the progression of her psychological condition and how it profoundly influences her creative expression in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, particularly through the character Septimus Warren Smith. The findings suggest that the English patriarchal system contributes significantly to the rise of mental disorders among the characters. The second study, conducted by Ali (2021), titled *The Psychological Effects of War and Traumatic Flashbacks in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier*, applies the psychoanalytic method in literary criticism to explore how war trauma affects young individuals post-conflict, identifying both novels as early representations of war trauma fiction through the experiences of their main characters. The third study by Khadija Liaquat (2021), titled *Identity Crisis and Displacement in Malouf's Remembering Babylon: A Postcolonial Critique*, examines the dehumanizing effects of colonialism on the colonized subject, who loses his true identity and becomes alienated by both indigenous Australians and white settlers. Drawing on postcolonial theories by Ashcroft et al. (place, displacement, and identity crisis) and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, this research reveals how the character's prolonged integration into indigenous culture leads to his rejection and marginalization, ultimately portraying the psychological and cultural struggles faced by displaced individuals in a colonized society.

METHOD

This research employed a literature review method to collect and examine relevant data. The researcher gathered information from various sources, including theses, journals, essays, and articles that are closely related to the topic of study. After collecting the data, a qualitative descriptive method was used to analyze the material. The analysis focused on Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the primary analytical framework. Several systematic steps were followed in the analysis process. First, the researcher carefully read the novel to identify key psychological and emotional elements. Second, the storyline and character conflicts were examined to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mental and emotional struggles. Third, significant conversations and narrative passages related to the characters' psychological conditions were noted and categorized. Finally, the researcher interpreted and described these findings through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, emphasizing how mental and emotional disturbances are portrayed in the characters' behavior and interactions within the narrative.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Personality Aspects of The Characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Personality is the overall pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are distinctive and consistent in a person, which distinguishes him from other individuals. Personality reflects how a person interacts with his environment and how he responds to various situations in everyday life. Personality in general is the overall characteristics of an individual that form a unique pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. Therefore, researchers can determine human psychology by looking at aspects of the person's personality. Personality as an organization of biological, psychological, and sociological factors that underlie individual behavior (Roucek and Warren, 1962)

a. Clarissa Dalloway

Before marrying Richard Dalloway, Clarissa's life in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* is depicted as a period of identity search, emotional passion, and more intellectually and spiritually liberated relationships—far from the conformity of the social life she eventually leads. She lives in Bourton (her childhood home in the countryside), surrounded by nature, memories, friendships, and intimate moments that shape her true identity before ultimately choosing the "safe" and respectable path as the wife of a politician. There, she is not yet constrained by the social obligations of being a politician's wife. She is surrounded by people like Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, who color her youth with passion, intellectual debates, and even ambiguous experiences of love. Clarissa Dalloway is often portrayed as a kind-hearted, warm, and cheerful person, yet beneath this surface lies a deep inner complexity. Her cheerful nature and kindness are especially evident in the way she greets daily life, interacts with others, and enjoys small things such as flowers, light, and the morning air.

Data 1

"What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at

Bourton into the open air." (Woolf,2024:5)

This quote demonstrates Clarissa's zest for life and cheerfulness, as she finds genuine joy in the simple act of opening the window in the morning, embracing the moment with a sense of wonder and appreciation that reflects her deep engagement with the world around her.

Data 2

"She loved life. London. This moment of June." (Woolf,2024:7)

This short but powerful quote reveals Clarissa's cheerful and loving nature, showing her ability to find joy in even the simplest things. It highlights her appreciation for the beauty of life, reflecting a deeply human and gentle perspective.

Data 3

"Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real were the flowers and the grass and the trees. But it was her gift, this giving of parties." (Woolf,2024:214-215)

Although she often reflects on the meaning of the party she holds, Clarissa organizes the party not out of vanity, but because she wishes to bring beauty and joy to others. This reflects her kindness and her desire to make people feel valued. When she was still a child, Clarissa was still 'Clarissa Parry', not 'Mrs. Richard Dalloway'. She was free to choose the direction of her life without being shaped by the social roles or obligations of a politician's wife

b. Septimus Warren Smith

Septimus is a thirty-year-old World War I veteran living in London with his wife, Lucrezia Smith. Septimus suffers from severe trauma due to the horrific experiences on the battlefield. Initially, Septimus appears 'tough' and shows no emotion when Evans dies a defense mechanism but this gradually destroys him from within. After returning from the war, he experiences severe symptoms of PTSD (although it was not named as such at the time): hallucinations, paranoia, delusions, and severe depression.

Septimus has a gentle and sensitive heart, particularly toward human suffering and the beauty of life. He was deeply affected by the death of his friend, Evans, which he suppressed within himself because he did not know how to confront it.

Data 4

"Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories, most were happy." (Woolf,2024:189)

"wrote poems to her, which, ignoring the subject, she corrected in red ink; he saw her, one summer evening, walking in a green dress in a square." (Woolf,2024:108)

This sentence shows that Septimus is a young man who appears tough on the outside, but is gentle and full of feeling on the inside, according to Rezia's perspective. Septimus is a young man who aspired to be a great writer and had a deep appreciation for Shakespeare's works. He also possessed a strong sense of nationalism and willingly went to war for his country.

Data 5

"Was he not like Keats? she asked; and reflected how she might give him a taste of Antony and Cleopatra" (Woolf,2024:108)

The quote "Was he not like Keats?" It shows how Septimus is seen as a romantic and poetic figure, reminiscent of the poet John Keats — a figure representing aesthetic sensibility, beauty, and suffering. This highlights his inner sensitivity and artistic soul, as well as the youthful idealism that links love with literature and beauty.

Before his trauma, Septimus was an idealistic, poetic figure, full of vitality. He went to war not for violence, but for dreams, love, and culture. The quotations above reveal how far he had fallen after the war, and how the social system at the time failed to address the psychological trauma he endured.

2. Factors Influencing the Personality Aspects of Characters in Mrs. Dalloway

Personality and mental health are closely intertwined, as personality plays a crucial role in shaping how an individual thinks, feels, and behaves, ultimately influencing both one's vulnerability to mental disorders and one's capacity to withstand psychological stress.

Personality and mental health are inseparable aspects of human psychological functioning and explains how personality dimensions such as harm avoidance and self-directedness play a role in a person's mental balance Cloninger, C. Robert (2004). Personality refers to the relatively stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving within an individual.

This section will discuss the causal factors that influence personality aspects on the mental health of the main characters in Mrs. Dalloway. By analyzing the nuanced details woven throughout Virginia Woolf's narrative, the researcher will explore how Woolf crafts the psychological complexity and depth of each character, while also examining the implications of their evolving personalities as they navigate the social, historical, and emotional landscapes presented in the novel. Through this exploration, the study seeks to uncover how the interplay between individual traits, external societal pressures, and internal psychological struggles shapes the mental well-being and personal development of characters and offering insights into the broader themes of identity, trauma, and the human condition in modernist literature.

a. Clarissa Dalloway

Clarissa Dalloway is the central character in Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. At the outset, she is portrayed as an upper-class woman in London, around fifty years old. Over the course of a single summer day, Clarissa is preoccupied with preparing for a party she will host at her home that evening. However, beneath this social activity, Clarissa harbors deep inner turmoil, which becomes the focus of the novel's psychological exploration.

Clarissa is a complex figure: outwardly, she appears calm, elegant, and respected, but internally she often feels lonely, anxious about death, and continually reflects on her past choices. She once loved her friend Sally Seton with great passion but ultimately chose to marry Richard Dalloway, a man considered more stable and socially acceptable. This decision haunts her and symbolizes the conflict between personal desire and societal expectations.

Clarissa lives in post-World War I English society, where upper-class women like herself were shaped by patriarchal expectations to be good wives, homemakers, and symbols of social stability. However, these roles feel shallow and emotionally and intellectually unfulfilling for Clarissa. As indicated in [data 5], she begins to question her identity, which has been shaped by the expectations of others rather than by her own desires. This leads to a sense of alienation from herself.

Data 6

"She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away... He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble." (Woolf,2024:234)

This quote illustrates how Clarissa Dalloway begins to question her own identity and experiences a sense of alienation from herself, as reflected in several passages throughout "*Mrs. Dalloway*". This quotation appears after Clarissa hears the news of Septimus Warren Smith's suicide. She feels a profound inner connection with him, as Septimus chose to reject a world that forces individuals to suppress their sensitivity and emotions. Clarissa perceives a sense of beauty and courage in his action and begins to feel once again the fragmentation of her own identity torn between living as a social symbol who must "assemble" herself and the desire to remain true to her inner self.

This quote reflects her feelings toward her existence, which has been confined by societal expectations.

Data 7

"Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself."

(Woolf, 2024:5)

"She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying no more having have a children now ..

"This being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway"

(Woolf, 2024:14-15)

"It was due to Richard; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. " (Woolf,2024:233)

"She made her drawing-room a sort of meeting-place; she had a genius for it " (Woolf,2024:98)

"She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat." (Woolf,2024:211)

"So it wasn't a failure after all! it was going to be all right now—her party. It had begun. It had started. But it was still touch and go. She must stand there for the present. (Woolf,2024:214)"

Another factor is social class and public appearance, or social image. As a member of London's elite, Clarissa is trapped by the pressure to appear perfect in the eyes of society. She feels that her life is filled with parties, trivial conversations, and appearances,



yet lacks true meaning. The opening line, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself," appears simple but actually reflects Clarissa's role in society: organizing, attending, and maintaining the image of the perfect hostess. She wishes to be seen by others as a charming upper-class woman with a respectable aristocratic image.

Here, Clarissa explicitly reveals that her identity has been taken over by her social role as the wife of a public figure, rather than as an individual named Clarissa. This is a clear example of existential alienation, where one feels detached from their authentic self. The above quotation illustrates how Clarissa feels that her identity as an individual has been eroded by her role in society, particularly as Richard Dalloway's wife. She feels that she has lost herself, no longer "Clarissa," but merely someone's wife. This is reflected in the statement "This being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" and "she had never been so happy. It is evident that she has truly lost control over herself because she has become Richard Dalloway's wife. She longs for her youth, before she married Richard Dalloway. Clarissa is at middle age, and her birthday becomes a symbol of reflection on the life she has lived. She feels threatened by time, which continues to move forward without giving her the space to return or fix the past. The quotations reflect her fear of transience and existential emptiness.

She feels a deep sense of anxiety. She feels "dangerous" within her life, meaning that every moment of her existence feels fragile, filled with uncertainty, and emotional threat. This is reflected in how her seemingly ordinary daily life actually conceals immense inner pressure and fear.

b. Septimus Warren Smith

Septimus Warren Smith, a pivotal character in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, embodies the psychological aftermath of war and serves as a profound critique of societal indifference toward mental illness. As a shell-shocked veteran of World War I, Septimus represents the disintegration of the human psyche under the weight of trauma, loss, and alienation. His hallucinations, emotional numbness, and detachment from reality reflect a deep internal crisis, intensified by the failure of medical authorities to recognize the legitimacy of his suffering.

Septimus' eventual suicide functions not merely as an individual tragedy, but as a symbolic act of resistance against a society that seeks to suppress vulnerability and enforce conformity. Several key factors that influence Septimus Warren Smith's hallucinations are closely related to his past war trauma, profound guilt, and the inability of society and medical professionals to understand his suffering.

His hallucinations, such as hearing the voice of his deceased friend Evans or seeing dead people around him, serve as psychological manifestations of the immense inner pressure he experiences. Septimus is a World War I veteran who directly witnessed death and destruction. The loss of his friend, Evans, deeply affected him, even though he initially denied his emotions.

Data 8

"So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel." (Woolf, 2024: 115)

"He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was worst..." (Woolf, 2024: 115)

He claims to "not care," but it is precisely because of this that the trauma develops into more severe symptoms, such as hallucinations. Septimus denies his feelings during the hallucinations because he is trapped in the post-war societal norms that demand men to be rational, strong, and unemotional. This denial is a response to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity, particularly that which emerged in England after World War I. In his society, psychological trauma is often not considered "real suffering", especially for men who have been regarded as war heroes.

After the war, Septimus was "promoted" and survived, but instead of feeling pride, he felt he had lost his humanity. He does not allow himself to grieve Evans' death because he was taught that feeling is a weakness. This sentence demonstrates how he does not process his grief in a healthy way. Because of this repression, the feelings that were suppressed eventually manifest as hallucinations and a dissociation from reality.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the psychological dimensions and personality aspects of the main characters in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* through the lens of literary psychology, particularly Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The analysis revealed that Clarissa Dalloway embodies emotional complexity, balancing social expectations with her inner longing for authenticity, beauty, and meaning. Her external charm and cheerfulness often mask a deeper sense of existential contemplation. In contrast, Septimus



Warren Smith represents a tragic figure whose idealism and sensitivity are crushed by the trauma of war, leading to psychological breakdown and hallucinations. Through both characters, Woolf captures the intricate relationship between inner life and social reality, presenting a profound exploration of identity, repression, and emotional conflict.

Furthermore, the study identified key factors shaping these characters' personalities, including societal roles, past experiences, emotional repression, and mental health struggles. Clarissa's transformation into a politically conforming wife and Septimus's descent into madness both reflect the pressures of a rigid society and the fragile balance between the id, ego, and superego. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how literature reflects psychological realities, emphasizing that fictional narratives like Mrs. Dalloway can offer critical insights into the human psyche. Ultimately, this research highlights the power of literary psychology in unraveling the inner workings of characters and sheds light on the emotional and psychological landscapes that define their lives.

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Cite this Article: Diba Hamzah, A.F., Rahman, F., Pattu, M.A.(2025). The Psychological Effects of Depression in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 8(9), pp. 4463-4469. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V8-i9-07>