

## Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*: A Study in the Integration of the Personality

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This article presents a case for a Jungian reading of *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa Dalloway's obsessions with individuation, personality, and death are seen in the light of the problems that the modern man has in Jung's account of him, namely in the light of the archetypal process of individuation. The novel is understood as the heroine's quest for the self. The article suggests that Jung's views could be fruitfully used in deciphering Virginia Woolf's work.

Everybody may be tempted to smile at the prospect of one more interpretation of Virginia Woolf's major novel. Yet, whosoever has chanced to read and reread Jung's analyses of the spiritual problem of modern man in, say, his collection of essays, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, or in *The Integration of the Personality*,<sup>1</sup> he would hardly fail to notice similarities and correspondences between Clarissa Dalloway's state of mind and the state of mind of modern man as presented by Carl Gustav Jung.

It would be presumptuous, of course, to promise anything like a comprehensive and coherent Jungian view of *Mrs Dalloway*. What we would like in all modesty to do is to draw a few parallels between those problems that modern man has in Jung's account of him with the problems that are Clarissa Dalloway's obsessions. Then, with great caution, we would like to develop these initial comparisons into a suggestion that, perhaps, Jung's views about the integration of the personality or, more specifically, his views of the process of individuation, and his gropings after its meaning, could fruitfully throw some light on Clarissa Dalloway's problems, and Virginia Woolf's too, as it would appear.

1. C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Harvest Books, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York, first published in 1933; *The Integration of the Personality*, Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, Toronto, 1939. The contents of this book reappear, with minor changes, in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959, and in *Psychology and Alchemy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1981.

The reader first learns about Mrs Dalloway from her insignificant neighbour Scrope Purvis. It is only an impression like any other in the novel, deceptively naive, perhaps, but in spite of its humble origin a very important one, if not crucial (very often quoted in critical works), hitting the centre of our problem, “[...] a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness”.<sup>2</sup> It is her illness and her age that have so much significance for our purpose here because they place Clarissa Dalloway among those who are “in the afternoon of life”,<sup>3</sup> to use one of Jung’s distinctions.

It is quite unusual that the hero of a book having many of the paraphernalia of an English social novel dealing with the portraiture of high-society life should be a person in her early fifties convalescing from a serious, almost fatal illness, closer, in fact, to death than to life and whose adjustment, if it is a question of adjustment at all, in the days to come would surely not be an adjustment to life but an adjustment to death.

An awareness of a life that has come to a standstill and can only be examined and reviewed in memory while one is separate and alone and conscious of death marks Clarissa Dalloway’s thoughts from the very beginning of the novel, merging with consolatory musings about being part of other people and sights and with more sombre thoughts about the end of time, the past war, and a life spent in vain.

She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day.<sup>4</sup>

Or, let us see another sequence of impressions about the end of life.

[...] – such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the wagons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpentine. But everyone remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it, or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived. [...] What was she trying to recover? What image of white dawn in the country, as she read in the book spread open:

Fear no more the heat o’ the sun  
Nor the furious winter’s rages.

This late age of world’s experience has bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrow; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing.<sup>5</sup>

By the way, Clarissa’s repeated quotation of the dirge from *Cymbeline* (Act 4, Sc. 2), as Avrom Fleishman has rightly warned us, would not seem to be a self-encouragement to endure life since “the dirge contains a biting ambiguity, which makes its way into the fiction: the singers are congratulating the (supposed) departed for escaping the rigours of nature, history, age – of life itself. Thus Clarissa’s affinity for the refrain may be taken as a mark of her strong propensity for death, which she indulges

2. V. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, Penguin Modern Classics, Harmondsworth, 1964, First published by Hogarth Press 1925, p. 6.

3. C. G. Jung, “The Aims of Psychotherapy”, in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 58.

4. *Mrs Dalloway*, pp. 10–11.

5. *Ib.* pp. 11–12.

in imagination throughout the work: on her morning walk (12), during her midday activity (45) and on her withdrawal from the party (202–4).<sup>6</sup>

And these revelations of loneliness, separation, and death are accompanied immediately by the thoughts of a life spent in vain, wishes to have it all over again, and by the resigned knowledge that the time of growth and development and gaining a position and reverence in the social world by fulfilling her maternal functions is irrevocably over.

How much she wanted it – that people should look pleased as she came in, [...] Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, whereas, she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew (and now the policeman held up his hand) for no one was ever for a second taken in. Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently! [...] But often now this body she wore [...], this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.<sup>7</sup>

It is hard not to think that “this astonishing and rather solemn progress” is a solemn progress towards death for which modern man is not prepared because he has lost his faith in transcendence, or, as Jung has put it, “But to believe has become today such a difficult art, that people, and particularly the educated part of humanity, can hardly find their way there”.<sup>8</sup>

These quotations from the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway* are only adumbrations of many similar or identical phrasings of the problem of death, decay and old age that appear and reappear in the novel. Jung's insights into the state of mind of the modern man are so similar in their formulations to Clarissa's insights into her own psyche that this must not pass unnoticed. And what is astonishing about that is the depth of Virginia Woolf's insight into the psyche of the modern man achieved, one fears, only by means of introspection. In his article, “The Aims of Psychotherapy”, Jung emphasized the difference between the neurotic problems of younger and older people.

It was with older patients that I had the greatest difficulties – that is, with persons over forty. [...] It seems to me that the elements of the psyche undergo in the course of life a very marked change – so much so, that we may distinguish between a psychology of the morning of life and a psychology of its afternoon. As a rule, the life of a young person is characterized by a general unfolding and a striving towards concrete ends; his neurosis, if he develops one, can be traced to his hesitation or his shrinking back from necessity. But the life of an older person is marked by a contraction of forces, by the affirmation of what has been achieved, and the curtailment of further growth. [...] Just as a youthful neurotic is afraid of life, so the older one shrinks back from death.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the closest Jung has ever come to describing a state of a mind like Clarissa's is given in a following statement:

6. A. Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading*, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore and London, 1975, pp. 86–87.

7. *Mrs Dalloway*, pp. 12–13.

8. “The Stages of Life”, in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 111.

9. *Ib.*, p. 58.

About a third of my cases are suffering from no clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and emptiness of their lives. It seems to me, however, that this can well be described as the general neurosis of our time. Fully two-thirds of my patients have passed middle age.<sup>10</sup>

Further remarks bring us even closer to Clarissa Dalloway. They speak of a feeling that one's life has come to a standstill although from the point of view of social adaptation there is no reason to complain. Such people ask Jung what they should do and he has no ready-made answers for them since this is both a personal and an age-old problem, lying in wait for every man.

This coming to a standstill is a psychic occurrence so often repeated in the evolution of mankind, that it has become the theme of many a fairy-tale and myth. We are told of the Open Sesame to the locked door, or of some helpful animal who finds the hidden way. We might put it in this way: "getting stuck" is a typical event which, in course of time, has evoked typical reactions and compensations.<sup>11</sup>

And this feeling of a personal standstill is only aggravated and, perhaps, caused by the war, by its undermining of "the illusion [...] that we are the culmination of the history of mankind, the fulfilment and the end-product of countless centuries",<sup>12</sup> leading us towards a sobering disillusionment that "we are also the disappointment of the hopes and expectations of the ages. Think of nearly two thousand years of Christian ideals followed, instead of by the return of the Messiah and the heavenly millenium, by the World War among Christian nations and its barbed-wire and poison-gas. What a catastrophe in heaven and on earth!"<sup>13</sup>

There are, of course, many other statements of Jung's to the same or similar effect which it would be impossible to refer to here. Yet, one should not be omitted since it casts a doubt both on our faith in ourselves and the rational organization of the world.

The revolution in our conscious outlook, brought about by the catastrophic results of the World War, shows itself in our inner life by the shattering of our faith in ourselves and our own worth. [...] I admit this the more readily because I realize only too well that I am loosing my faith in the possibility of a rational organization of the world, [...]<sup>14</sup>

With limitations of this kind, one's own old age corresponding to "this late age of world's experience", and a life not lived through satisfactorily, lived in vain, what kind of hope remains for Clarissa since there is hardly any hope of a new life or of immortality? That Clarissa has desiccated and narrowed down her life by her marriage to Richard Dalloway, a member of Parliament, has been made clear, but this was the way she adapted herself to the social world. Not only Clarissa's, but everybody's adjustment to the requirements of a particular social situation in which one must find one's place is done, according to Jung, at the cost of one's personality development.

We wholly overlook the essential fact that the achievements which society rewards are won at the cost of a diminution of peronality. Many – far too many – aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among dusty memories. Sometimes, even, they are glowing coals under gray ashes.<sup>15</sup>

10. "The Aims of Psychotherapy", *Ib.*, p. 61.

11. *Ib.*, p. 62.

12. "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man", *Ib.*, p. 199.

13. *Ib.*

14. *Ib.*, p. 203.

15. "The Stages of Life", *Ib.*, p. 104.

What would seem, then, to be a particular metaphysical duty of an ageing person, “is a duty and a necessity to give serious attention to himself”.<sup>16</sup> In happier ages religion provided guidance “for old age, death and eternity”,<sup>17</sup> but modern man cannot accept such guidance any more, having lost his faith. And modern acquisitive society offers neither guidance nor encouragement for a personal involvement with the building up of “a state of wider and higher consciousness”.<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, “nature cares nothing whatsoever about a higher level of consciousness; quite the contrary. And then society does not value these feats of the psyche very highly; its prizes are always given for achievement and not for personality – the latter being rewarded, for the most part, posthumously”.<sup>19</sup>

In the course of his career Jung has developed not only the distinctions of the conscious and unconscious psychic life but the distinctions between the ego and the self. The shortest way of defining these last two terms is to say that the ego stands for the conscious self and that it has long been mistaken, in Western culture, for the centre of one's personality and its most noble and valuable part. The unconscious has gained a bad reputation through the Freudian school's view of it as a repository of the monstrosities of inner life. Jung wanted to redress this injustice and one of his remarks leads us back to the question of the responsibility for the First World War.

Have the horrors of the World War really not opened our eyes? Are we still unable to see that man's conscious mind is even more devilish and perverse than the unconscious?<sup>20</sup>

“Devilish and perverse”, the assumption is, just because it has cut itself loose from the life giving forces of the unconscious psyche, trying to suppress and swallow it and so endangering the inner balance of life.

Our European ego-consciousness is therefore inclined to swallow up the unconscious, and if this should not prove feasible we try to suppress it. But if we understand anything of the unconscious, we know that it cannot be swallowed. We also know that it is dangerous to suppress it, because the unconscious is life and this life turns against us if suppressed, as happens in neurosis.<sup>21</sup>

Life is desiccated and narrowed, then, only through the neglect of the unconscious. A process of the integration of the personality, or of individuation, would, then, be a process of striking a balance between the conscious and the unconscious parts of the psyche or, as Jung put it:

If we now turn back to the problem of individuation, we shall see ourselves faced with a rather extraordinary task: the psyche consists of two incongruous halves which together should form a whole.<sup>22</sup>

The self, as the result of the process of individuation, would become a new centre of the personality and its circumference at the same time, because it would hold both the conscious and the unconscious parts of the psyche in balance. The process of integration

16. *Ib.*, p. 109.

17. *Ib.*

18. *Ib.*, p. 102.

19. *Ib.*

20. “Dream-Analysis in its Practical Application”, *Ib.*, p. 16.

21. “Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation”, in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p.

22. *Ib.*, p. 287.

“is an irrational life-process”<sup>23</sup> bringing about “the union of opposites”<sup>24</sup> which Jung has called the transcendent function<sup>25</sup> representing, perhaps, a new unity of the subject and object.

So Clarissa's loneliness, isolation, coldness towards her husband, “a virginity preserved through childbirth”, can be attributed to her conscious ego's absolute predominance. The words Clarissa uses to describe her defects are prophetic of a process of the integration of the personality beginning in her.

She could see what she lacked. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together.<sup>25</sup>

“Something central which permeated” is a very close description of Jung's self, the centre and circumference of the psyche. It is something after which Virginia Woolf was certainly groping in her attempts to establish the peace and balance of her own mind. And so, perhaps, she was writing this novel – for other characters in the book, Peter Walsh and Septimus Warren Smith, are engaged in the same process as Clarissa – to objectify for herself what the process of the integration of the personality might mean or be, an open conflict and open collaboration of the conscious and unconscious psyche, the process of their harmonizing<sup>26</sup> in the face of the great crisis of Western culture manifested in the First World War. The novel establishes a correlation between the crisis in Western civilization and the personal identity crisis of Clarissa Dalloway who is trying hard to reintegrate herself into a new kind of unbreakable whole, an individual facing death and the collapse of her culture. Is this desperate vitality the thing that excites those numerous repeated attempts, as this one is, at interpreting *Mrs Dalloway* which, with every new reading builds up the old and invokes new admiration for its author and her tormented soul?

#### ROMAN VIRGINIJE WOOLF *GOSPOĐA DALLOWAY*: STUDIJIA O INTEGRACIJI LIČNOSTI

Ovaj članak pruža dokaze za mogućnost jungovskog čitanja *Gospode Dalloway*. Opsjednutost Clarisse Dalloway individuacijom, ličnošću i smrću promatraju se u svjetlu problema koje moderni čovjek ima prema Jungovu tumačenju, dakle u svjetlu arhetipskog procesa individuacije. Roman je shvaćen kao potraga junakinje za svojom vlastitošću. Članak sugerira da bi se Jungovi pogledi mogli plodonosno iskoristiti za odgonetanje značenja djela Virginije Woolf.

23. *Ib.*, p. 289.

24. *Ib.*

25. *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 36.

26. *See: Archetypes*, pp. 288–89.