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## **Moments of Being, A Real Trauma Truth of Virginia Woolf?**

Writing of Trauma in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*

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# Table of Contents

- Introduction ..... 3
- 1. Chapter One: Theoretical Study.....12
  - 1.1 Freudian Concept of Trauma.....12
  - 1.2 Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth..... 13
  - 1.3 Dominick LaCapra: Trauma and History ..... 14
  - 1.4 Anne Whitehead: Trauma and Fiction.....15
- 2. Chapter Two *Mrs. Dalloway*: A Search for Self-representation of Virginia Woolf.....18
  - 2.1 Clarissa.....20
  - 2.2 Lucrezia.....26
  - 2.3 Kilman.....30
- 3. Chapter Three *To the Lighthouse*: A Self-therapy Confronting Life.....34
  - 3.1 Trauma from War.....35
  - 3.2 Trauma from Death.....40
  - 3.3 Gendered Trauma.....44
- 4. Chapter Four: “Moments of Being” in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*..... 51
  - 4.1 Loss and Transcendence – Moments of Being of Mrs. Dalloway.....54
  - 4.2 Truth and Beauty – Moments of Being of Lily Briscoe.....58
- Conclusion.....64
- Works Cited.....67

*Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation.*

*Dominick LaCapra*

## **Introduction**

### **1. About the Author**

Compared with most literary works before the early 1890s, which emphasised the plot and detailed descriptions of characters and settings, Virginia Woolf's writing focuses on the inner world of her characters, or her own, which is also the truth she pursues in her lifetime. Through my study, I hope to figure out such a few research questions in three main aspects: What kinds of trauma does Woolf display through her female figures in her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*? In what ways did the traumatic experience leave an irrevocable influence on Woolf's literary writing? How does Woolf represent her trauma and growth in her works and then how to work through trauma in the process of her writing? How does Woolf use both fictional and autobiographical writing to tell her own trauma truths, how fiction (these novels) then reveals the truth of the historical process in her trauma works? The thesis argues that the trauma of fictional characters, especially the female characters in the novels is an artistic representation of Woolf's personal trauma. Woolf uses the construction of female characters in the novels to accomplish a self-deconstruction and self-healing from trauma; while depicting the characters, Woolf strips the life of both hers and her figures to

some moments of being and gets down to the truth of life. The writing of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* is not only the writing of the author's self-trauma and truth-telling, but also a kind of rebuilding of the self; for Woolf, writing is healing, and the redeeming of her fragmented self. Meanwhile, by means of the analysis of the two novels, the thesis will also demonstrate Woolf's works have great aesthetic value as well as profound social and realistic significance to object to those critics who consider Woolf is a narrow-minded writer who lives in her own world and cuts off from the reality of her time, pays attention to only people's inner world and ignores the sociality of works.

As Lyndall Gordon comments, "The story of her life is the story of her creation and re-creation of herself as a writer. Therefore, her novels are seen as providing important biographical evidence. Equally, her life story provides us with the essential parameters of reading her fiction" (Gordon 6). Since most of Woolf's novels are based on her own experience and her characters shaping are based on the important people in her life, it is impossible to separate the literary analysis of her works from the study and the interpretation of her real life.

Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, 1882 in London. Since she and her sister were educated at home (while her brothers were able to receive formal education at school) by her father, an English author, literary critic and the founder of the Dictionary of National Biography, the education she received was unsystematic and sporadic. Important might her natural gift for literary creation be, her life experience, the trauma she suffered in her life in particular, did not fail to offer an implicative background for us to understand some of her distinctive language and creative style.

Woolf had been in a contemplative mood since her childhood. But she also had a sense of humor and sometimes even a bit of mischief. She learnt to speak a little later than ordinary children but soon language becomes a powerful weapon for her to stand out among her brothers and sisters. Vanessa, her sister, dreamed to be a painter, however Virginia hoped to be a writer. She had been good at making up stories since she was very young and telling them to her brothers and sisters before going to bed every night. This talent had been fully developed in her later creative life.

Woolf suffered a lot emotionally during her childhood and youth. Her mother died when she was thirteen. Since her mother's death, Woolf had been suffering from complex moods of mania and depression. Then, Stella Duckworth, her half-sister, died two years later. Then following her father Leslie Stephen died of cancer in 1904. When her brother Thoby died in 1906, Woolf almost broke down. After her father's death, Woolf moved with her sister Vanessa and two brothers to Bloomsbury, which would become the centre of Bloomsbury Group. In 1912, she married the political theorist and publisher Leonard Woolf, also one of the members of the Bloomsbury Group. In 1917, they set up the famous Hogarth Press together, to encourage Woolf's writing with a calm environment.

In addition to experiencing the death of the family she loved prematurely, another traumatic memory in her early years was the incestuous abuse from her half brothers. Both Woolf's mother and father had marriages before they got married and had separately brought their children in their first marriage into the newly combined household. When she was young, Woolf was sexually abused by her two half brothers and had been physically pained and emotionally traumatised. She mentioned this in her memoir *A Sketch of the Past*, "Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes... I remember how I hoped that he would stop...But it did not stop" (*Moments of Being* 69). These traumatic experiences would definitely leave an inevitable effect on her later mental health and her creation. She also described her feelings and told us that she did "remember resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it" (*Moments of Being* 69). To Woolf, if life has a foundation, it is memory. She described the past as "an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions" (*Moments of Being* 67). Her childhood is like a quagmire that she can't get out of all her life.

As one of the most innovative pioneers of the stream of consciousness novelists, Woolf has made great contributions to its blossom both in theory and practice. Her literary career as a novelist could be subdivided into three stages. Her first two novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), are both written in a relatively traditional form since the narrative follows a linear chronology. Novels in the middle phase are *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf develops a new writing style, which is almost closer to creating a new form of the novel. Through the interior

monologue, she shows readers a series of personal impressions, explores and explains all aspects of the character's personality. This stream of consciousness technique has been further developed in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which represents her first successful attempt to create a novel with her own unique narrative style, abandoning the traditional rigid narration form, offering readers a better understanding of her inner world in a more elaborate way. The novel marks the emergence of Woolf's mature voice of narration and the perfection of her experimental narrative skills. As far as writing skills are concerned, following *To the Lighthouse* shows a higher degree of proficiency. The third phase includes *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941). Woolf is a tireless experimenter in the literary creation. In her last stage of creation, instead of logically perfecting the method of stream of consciousness, she embarks on an independent and unconnected path. E. M. Forster praises Woolf like this, "It is easy for a novelist to describe what a character thinks of... But to convey the actual process of thinking is a creative feat, and I know of no one except Virginia Woolf who has accomplished it" (Foster 60).

Additionally, Woolf is also an insightful and influential critic and essayist in Britain. She began to write reviews for the Times Literary Supplement in her early time. Her critical essays cover almost the entire fields of English literature and are praised for her unique insights, including some of her best proeses. Although Woolf suffered from depression and some other mental disorders for most of her life, and the outbreak of the wars also hit her to the bottom spiritually, she never stopped writing, even before her death.

Because of her position of an outstanding modernist novelist, more and more scholars tend to discuss Woolf's works from the angle of her writing and the trauma. Inasmuch as Freud is contemporary with Woolf, it's no surprise that many Woolf scholars show an unremitting interest in interpreting Woolf and her traumatic writing from the perspective of psychoanalysis. In *Virginia Woolf and the Fiction of Psychoanalysis*, Abel offers an excellent reading of Woolf's novels and essays through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. Other critics also made efforts in study on the interrelation between Woolf's literary works and her traumatic experiences, DeSalvo, for example, develops this relationship in his *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*. DeSalvo discusses the influence of the family structure, the growth of Virginia, the social root for her trauma, the reflection of her trauma in her works as well. Moran, in *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the*

*Aesthetics of Trauma*, explores the aesthetics of trauma in Woolf's and Rhys's works, examines how the childhood sexual abuse traumatised these two female writers and how it influences their writing. Madelyn Detloff discusses war, time, trauma in Woolf's writing, especially her novel *Between the Acts* in the book *The Persistence of Modernism Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century*. Toni Morrison also completed her master's thesis discussing the alienation in the works of both William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, or specifically, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Besides, Joyes identifies *Mrs. Dalloway* as a piece of modernist trauma literature because it encompasses "the influence of First World War traumas, including death, disability, and psychic injury". And in the essay "The First World War and Women as the Victims of War Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Novels", some researchers and students who are interested in Woolf's war and trauma writing also pointed out that "in her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* she offers a depiction of gender polarization and women as traumatized victims of the war" (Uygur 3).

## **2. Historical and Cultural Context**

The changes as well as influence of literary ideas and artistic trends are rooted in the development of the times and the changes of life. It was such an era of change and turbulence that Virginia Woolf lived in. Queen Victoria died in 1901, which marks the end of an Era: the transition of Britain from an agricultural country to the industrial society had been gradually completed. With the rapid development of capitalism, the traditional family and class structure was collapsing, resulting in an economic crisis for the whole British society. At the same time, the unprecedented intensification of contradictions among some European countries finally led to the first World War from 1914 to 1918. This unprecedented catastrophe is extremely destructive to human both in material and spirit. War not only consumed a lot of material wealth, but also destroyed both the bodies and the minds of millions of people. Rationality, justice, morality, religion, state, family, freedom, equality and humanity, these traditional concepts were torn apart by artillery and bombs. People suddenly lost all their spiritual support.

After the war, the whole capitalist world was in turmoil. Britain was certainly no exception. Compared with 1913, Britain's industrial output value decreased by 10% and the export volume decreased by 30% in 1919. Hyperinflation caused prices to soar, in 1920, prices in Britain rose to 225% compared with 1914. The deterioration of the economy had caused

fierce class struggle and rapid social changes. Rapid changes were not limited to economy and politics. Fundamental changes had also taken place in the ideological and cultural fields. In that turbulent era, traditional beliefs had been shaken and replaced by a skeptical attitude. In daily life, the traditional religious and ethical concepts were overthrown, meanwhile, people could no longer accept the traditional model of Victorian family life in which women usually take a back seat. They began to constantly doubt various social life norms recognised by the old times, and believed that uncertainty was a real norm.

This skeptical attitude and relativistic concept also invaded the academic field, resulting in the surge of new theories and ideological schools and the coexistence of pluralism. In the field of psychology, William James put forward the concept of stream of consciousness, Freud founded the school of psychoanalysis which is then developed by Jung and Adler. Besides, there is Bergson's intuition and creative evolution in philosophy, Einstein's theory of relativity in physics, James Frazer's research on primitive society and totemism culture in anthropology. Although these theories and study may not be understood by the general public at that time, their great role in promoting western modern society can not be ignored. The theories of these explorers permeate, support and confirm each other to varying degrees, and also stimulate people's curiosity and sensitivity to new ideas. Max Planck, the founder of quantum mechanics, offered a good description of this situation: "We are in a position similar to that of a mountaineer who is wandering over uncharted spaces, and never knows whether behind the peak which he sees in front of him and which he tries to scale there may not be another peak still beyond and higher up" (Planck 200).

Literature is also absolutely influenced by this trend of skepticism. In order to reflect the rapid and dramatic changes of this era, writers felt it necessary to change their literary ideas and transform their ways of expression. Through in-depth investigation and practice, they redefined the functions of poetry, drama as well as novel, and created some unusual and relatively incomprehensible works, such as the long poem *The Waste Land* by T.S.Eliot, *Four Years* by Yeats, and the stream of consciousness novels by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Modernist literature is anti-traditional in structure, form and ideological content. Because innovative writers insist on creating new literary forms, dramas and novels without plot and poems without rhythm first appeared. In sum, this is an era of great turbulence, crisis, change,



as well as of broken traditional ideas, shaken basic beliefs, and rapid changes in cultural trends. Therefore, even Woolf sighed and stated that era like this,

Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream (*Moments of Being* 80).

Even if she said so, Woolf still swam hard in this stream. In such a complex context, Woolf completed the creation of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. *Mrs. Dalloway* is set in June of 1923 and was written in 1925, and *To the Lighthouse* centres on the Ramsay family and their visits to an Isle in Scotland between 1910 and 1920. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, by depicting the shell-shocked veteran Septimus Smith and upper-class hostess Clarissa Dalloway, Woolf shows her critique of Western – and specifically British – patriarchal society and imperialism with its inescapable consequences of global war and trauma. Over the decades, the novel has been analysed as a psychological study of the effects of war, as well as from psychoanalytical approaches that focus on loss and trauma, such as “Trauma and recovery in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*” by Karen DeMeester, “Traumatic figures: The inscription of world war in ‘Mrs. Dalloway’, ‘Sula’, ‘The Night Porter’, and ‘Hiroshima, Mon Amour’ by Kim, Karen Kyyung, “Death was an attempt to communicate”: Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* in Wyatt Bonikowski’s *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination : The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction*, Barral’s “Clothing and Colours in *Mrs Dalloway*: Strategies for female characterization” and so on.

Similarly, since its publication in the 1930s, *To the Lighthouse* has been the focus in academic circles, and it is also regarded as one of Woolf’s masterpieces. It takes going to the lighthouse as the central clue throughout the whole novel, describing some episodes of life experiences of the Ramsays and several guests before and after the first World War. The prototypes of Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* are Woolf’s parents. When Woolf wrote this novel, she was gradually recovered from the previous breakdown. In the process of her creation, she expressed her feelings heartily, spilt all the memories stored in her mind for

many years and created the with ease and verve that she never had before. In the West, before the 1970s, people mainly regarded *To the Lighthouse* as a modern aesthetic work, focusing on the analysis of the narrative techniques and artistic forms of the work; in the past 30 years, the novel has been studied from varied theoretical perspectives including psychoanalysis, deconstruction and feminist criticism, etc, such as *The Cambridge Companion to To The Lighthouse* edited by Allison Pease, which makes an elaborate analysis of the novel from a variety perspectives such as narration, movement and space, feminism and gender, art and so on, Neimneh and Almwajeh's article "Memory and Artistic Dissent: An Analogical Reading of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Atwood's *Surfacing*", "*To the Lighthouse: Memory and Art Therapy*". Also in China, some scholars tend to concentrate on its writing techniques of stream of consciousness as well as the interpretation from a feminist or deconstructive perspective, such as "Difference and integration: Feminist Analysis and understanding of *To the Lighthouse*", "Human Initiative in the Autobiographical Stream of Consciousness Novel *To the Lighthouse*". But not many researchers have analysed it from the perspective of trauma to explore the relationship between Woolf's personal trauma truths and her fictional writing of this novel.

### **3. Structural Layout of the Thesis**

This thesis will approach the novels mainly from the perspective of trauma theory, especially under the framework of the Freudian concept of trauma and other related trauma theories by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Anne Whitehead and so on, through which I could further understand Woolf's creative inspiration and influence brought by her trauma and how to better interpret the traumatic elements in her works.

The thesis is composed of three parts: the first part is this Introduction, giving a brief sketch of the background of Virginia Woolf and the historical context as well as some literary review of the two novels. The second part – body part, is composed of four main chapters. Chapter one will map out the theoretical basis of the whole study, especially trauma theories from several main scholars in their specialty. Chapter two will demonstrate Woolf's strong criticism of war and patriarchy by analysing the writing of trauma in her antiwar novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, disclosing the trauma of female caused by the Great War from perspectives of three women in the novel. Chapter three will separately expose and discuss the trauma caused by the War, Death, and Gender Injustice in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* to the author and

society at the time. And combined with the analyses of Woolf's autobiographical collection *Moments of Being*, the last chapter will describe how Woolf uses the two novels to tell the truth of her trauma and how to heal herself, present Woolf's spiritual rebirth and efforts to get out of the shadow of trauma from *Mrs. Dalloway*, and reveal how the writing of trauma in *To the Lighthouse* is part of Virginia Woolf's efforts to make sense of and redeem her fragmented self.

Through close readings of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, this thesis discusses the ways in which Woolf constructs female characters who express aspects of her own traumatic experience. Although I do not claim to prove a scientific cause and effect, it is reasonable to conclude that Woolf's writing through the traumas of her characters likewise helped her to regulate and relieve her own traumas. Moreover, by researching Woolf's these two stream of consciousness novels, we not only can appreciate her exquisite writing skill, and the aesthetic value of her works, but also understand its implicative social significance.

## Chapter One: Theoretical Study on Trauma and Fiction

### 1. Freudian Concept of Trauma

The thesis is basically based on the framework of the Freudian concept of trauma, which is a foundational trauma theory and useful for interpreting Woolf's early twentieth century novels. Trauma is the Greek word for "wound" and it is a term only for physical wounds originally. Freud later developed the notion to refer to not only the physical injury, but also an emotional wound, which is well accepted by most people nowadays. Freud claims that "we describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure* 29). According to Sylvan Keiser, "the concept of trauma, or the word 'trauma' itself, seems to be used in psychoanalytic literature as a designation for anything that causes harm to the psyche" (Keiser 781). But obviously, the wound of the body does not exactly equate to the wound of the mind.

Freud suggests that there are two models of trauma: the model of castration trauma and the model of traumatic neurosis, which just right explain most of the trauma syndrome in Woolf's novels. Concerning the first model, Freud refers to the premature trauma and illustrates "early (i.e. premature) traumas which the immature ego was unable to master" (Freud, *Analysis Terminable* 220) and "the impressions of this period impinge upon an immature and feeble ego, and act upon it like traumas" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* 147). As for the second model, Freud states that "We give the name of traumas, to those impressions, experienced early and later forgotten, to which we attach such great importance in the aetiology of the neuroses", "it is possible ... there is a fairly close relationship between the danger-situation that is operative and the form taken by the ensuing neurosis" (Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 142). The former is the theory of repression and return of the repressed whereas the latter is accident trauma theory, which generally includes accident victims and veterans. The trauma of protagonists such as Septimus and Lucrezia in *Mrs. Dalloway* can be classified into the second one, while in the most autobiographical novel *To the Lighthouse*, the origins of Lily Briscoe's trauma fit into the combination of first one and the second one.

## 2. Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth

Trauma theory in the Humanities emerged in the United States in the early 1990s, seeking to elaborate on the cultural and ethical implications of trauma, then, “the field of trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*” (Balaev 4). According to Caruth, ‘trauma’ in the broadest definition is “describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11). Caruth puts more effort into understanding its surprising impact than on redefining trauma, so as to “examine how trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notion of experience, and of communication in therapy, in the classroom, and in literature, as well as in psychoanalytic theory” (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 4). Therefore, Caruth combined essays and interviews by literary theorists, filmmakers, sociologists, psychiatrists and so on in order to emphasise the trans-disciplinary nature of trauma theory.

Trauma survivors are often troubled by PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), which is “the most destructive psychic disorder” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 58). It is important to remark that post-traumatic stress disorder has not received attention as a mental illness until the late years of the 20th century, named in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 1980. Its symptoms include flashbacks, hallucinations, numbness, amnesia and avoidance of triggering stimuli, and the characteristics of trauma are belatedness and repetition. After a lot of collections, studies and summaries of trauma, Caruth saw the truth of the traumatic experience:

If PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of history that they cannot entirely possess. (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5)

In *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, Caruth describes the structure of trauma as a historical or temporary destruction. Traumatic events have not been fully experienced or thoroughly

understood at the time it occurs, but only experienced or understood in their insistent return, thus, this traumatic experience can not be used for memory and interpretation in the usual way.

According to Caruth, trauma is like not a symptom of subconsciousness, but history. Since the traumatic experience has not been integrated by the individual, the event can not be possessed in a normal memory form or a conventional narrative way. On the contrary, trauma, characterised by its haunting nature, continues to possess the victims with its constant repetition and returns. Thus for Caruth, trauma represents a mode of haunting: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4-5). Caruth believes that literary fiction plays a very important role in providing readers with a kind of narration, which is not a direct reference, but a powerful mode of access to history and memory. At the same time, trauma also responds to literature, or culture, and even history. As Caruth states like this, “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11). Thus according to Cathy Caruth, reading the traumatic literary works is, just as her book’s title “Trauma: Explorations in Memory” indicates, to explore in the memory of the victim as well as of us for a complete understanding of the trauma.

### **3. Dominick LaCapra: Trauma and History**

Similarly, LaCapra also uses and transcends contemporary critical theory in assessing the influence of trauma on present-day historical writing. In his *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra explores the distinction between two approaches to historiography: the documentary research model and the radical constructivist model. And he also affirms and rethinks of the term of trauma as historical trauma and structural trauma.

According to LaCapra, any critical understanding of the history of the twentieth century must have a central on the theory of trauma; trauma not only constructs the subjectivity of survivors in the history, but also requires the deliberate construction of the specific subjectivity of “secondary witnesses”. He asks that “Should historiography rely only on standard operating procedures, however necessary some of them (such as footnoting) may

be, when it confronts such limit events and attempts to address the problem of trauma in its bearing on different groups or subject positions?” (LaCapra *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 205).

For LaCapra, much about the past is ascertainable; historians, particularly historians of trauma should seek for a illustrating of the past’s reality into “critically tested . . . empirically accurate, accessible memory of significant events which becomes part of the public sphere” (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 95). It requires much more than simply recording the past, it demands more a disciplined and ethical empathy with the traumatised person, “understood in terms of attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others” (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 40). LaCapra names this “empathic unsettlement” that entails “being responsive to the traumatic experience of others” (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 41), while insisting that an empathy that, “resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of the other would depend both on one’s own potential for traumatization... and on one’s recognition that another’s loss is not identical to one’s own loss” (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 79). He believes that empathy can also be seen as fighting against victimisation, including self victimisation, but at the same time, objectivity should not be “identified with objectivism or exclusive objectification that denies all forecloses empathy” (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 40), just as empathy should not be confused with the unchecked identification.

In terms of history, he maintains that taking trauma in second-hand “must mean moving from acting out to working through” (Goss 439):

When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out... but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 90).

#### 4. Anne Whitehead: Trauma and Fiction

Besides Caruth and LaCapra, Anne Whitehead is another influential theorist further expounding the interrelation between trauma theory and literary fiction, considering the ways in which trauma has affected fictional form and exploring how novelists have responded to the challenge of writing traumatic narratives.

Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction*, as the title suggests, started a monograph by means of illustrating the relation between trauma and fiction. Trauma, usually includes an overwhelming event or experience, and tends to resist language, expression and representation, then how can it be narrated in the fiction? Whitehead responds this in the Introduction part, "The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered... It is also clear that fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma" (Whitehead 3).

In order to provide convincing arguments for how trauma theory successfully to alter people's understanding of trauma and their appreciation of trauma fictions, Whitehead's discussion builds on the theoretical work of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub and so on. Rather than stating their ideas mechanically, Whitehead studies and comments on them, assimilates their views into her own theoretical system and applies the refined incisive theory into her analyses of trauma fictions. For instance, Whitehead thinks the trauma in Caruth's writing is a "crisis of truth" and that this traumatic crisis could be able to extend beyond the victims so that the historical experience could be understood at a cultural level.

In addition, Whitehead also studied the literary techniques by which novelists had resorted to represent trauma – "or to narrate the unnarratable" (Whitehead 4), and discussed the literary devices which characterised the genre of trauma fiction. One of the examples is that Whitehead mentioned the function of "repetition" in *Trauma Fiction*: "One of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Reception mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression (Whitehead 86). Woolf



did use a lot of repetition techniques in both novels, directly strengthening the trauma manifestation of the characters or indirectly arousing the empathy of the readers.

Accordingly, my analysis of the writing of trauma in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* is mainly based on the my understanding of Freudian concept of trauma, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, Dominick LaCapra's history and trauma studies and Anne Whitehead's integrated theory of trauma and fiction.

## **Chapter Two *Mrs. Dalloway* – A Search for Self-representation of Virginia Woolf**

*Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, is a representative work that Virginia Woolf departs from earlier romantic and realist traditions as a modernist, an innovative novel “to write a woman’s life with only one day”. Instead of creating primary contexts among the characters to push the story forward, Woolf proceeds her narrative by following the passing hours of a day. The story is developed by the movements from one character to another, or of movements from the inner thoughts of one character to the inner thoughts of another. Through this particular writing technique, Woolf offers a scathing indictment of the traditional British class system and capitalism and a strong criticism of patriarchy.

The novel revolves around the different worlds and inner thought processes of two main characters: Clarissa Dalloway, a 51-year-old woman in the upper class whose husband is a noble politician, and Septimus Warren Smith, a veteran soldier suffering from a mental disorder due to the horrors of First World War. It also spotlights several minor characters who reflect the inner worlds and trauma of the main characters.

The action of the novel takes place on a day in London in June 1923. On a regular June morning, Clarissa goes to buy flowers to prepare a party as usual. Peter Walsh, her former lover who comes back from India, Sally Seton, her best friend she adores from girlhood, Septimus Warren Smith, a war survivor suffering from shell shock, as well as a mixture of different people in London society, are shuttling through her mind, causing her endless nostalgia for the youth and a kind of panic about the coming immutable life. She suddenly feels that something important in her heart “drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 157). She has grown up to be a popular, brilliant political banquet hostess but sacrificed her real opportunity to experience the essence of life. Once Mrs. Dalloway was a blooming girl who had many beautiful pursuits for the future, but now she is just an ornament of the upper class in London. In such confrontation, Clarissa’s desire for freedom is constantly struggling with the traditional constraints and the requirements of the historical context. At the crossroads of sense and sensibility, Mrs. Dalloway suffered and hesitated. She chose concession years ago. Now how should she or how can she choose? It can be said that the decades of life from Clarissa to Mrs. Dalloway is a sonata of struggle and compromise.

The home scene then shifts to Septimus, sitting in Regent's Park with his wife, Lucrezia, and waiting to see his psychiatrist. Unexpectedly, the doctor doesn't sincerely communicate with Septimus in spite of his serious mental disorder, and suggests that it is better to separate him from his wife and send him to a rest home. In order to escape what he perceives to be an oppressive social pressure and confront reality in his own way, Septimus finally commits suicide. In this novel, Clarissa and Septimus do not know each other, however, their minds have peculiar parallels. Although Septimus is considered mentally ill or even insane by society and Clarissa is considered sane, they experience an astonishing connection in feeling: joy over the tender leaves of spring, panic and fear of onrushing time, as well as guilt over what they've seen and felt the crime of being human.

*Mrs. Dalloway* breaks through the boundaries of time and space, in a particular way, displays the subjective psychological changes of the characters of a day or even a lifetime. Marcussen mentioned "time and space" in *To the Lighthouse* that "the spatial "Time Passes" depicts a long period of time; the spatial interludes depict only one day" (Marcussen, 146), I believe it can also apply to *Mrs. Dalloway*. But we can describe it in a contrary way: "time passes" depicts only one-day-life but the spacial interval witnesses a special history, or true reality in *Mrs. Dalloway*. According to Marcussen, what distinguishes these novelists like Woolf is "their departure from and fracture of realistic representation of reality... emphasises the one-day structure of these novels and their indeterminacy towards an objective reality" (Marcussen 146). But their indeterminacy of the objective reality in the novel is also dependent on what they have been really suffered and witnessed; departure and fracture is partly responsible, at the same time we can not deny the influence of what really happened.

In addition, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf connects Clarissa and Septimus' two different lives under the action of consciousness, and explores the significance of life destiny. This technique of emphasising the natural flow of consciousness has become a new modernist technique, faithfully depicting the inner truth of both figures in written and the author herself. Growing up in a turbulent environment of war, childhood trauma and misfortune, Woolf has formed a strong but depressed character. Writing has become her form of struggle, and her characters are full of her own depression and pursuit. From the perspective of creative writing of psychology, on the one hand, the writer's trauma experience can help

them see through things better, on the other hand, it also shapes their creative personality and artistic style. Similarly, for readers, if they hope to better relate to what the writer expresses (of course it is not necessary), the trauma in the work is better to be understood with “ ‘reference to the specific contexts in which it occurs’, including cultural norms, political context, the nature of the event, the organization of the community, and so forth” (Kaplan 39).

Trauma in *Mrs. Dalloway* is a gendered phenomenon shared by the female protagonist Clarissa and some other minor female characters like Sepyimus’s wife Lucrezia, as well as Clarissa’s daughter – Elizabeth’s teacher Kilman. Based on the understanding of the text and my personal research interest, this chapter mainly analyses the writing influenced by trauma in *Mrs. Dalloway* from the perspective of several female characters (Clarissa, Lucrezia and Kilman) in the novel, offering a setup to so as to reveal the author’s own spiritual rebirth and her efforts to walk out the shadow of trauma in the last chapter.

## **2.1 Clarissa**

Women’s grief and pain originate from the oppression under the burden of patriarchal social values. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is especially represented by the war trauma and gendered trauma given to women by patriarchy. In male-dominated Victorian and Edwardian societies, women are not allowed to openly express their fury and agony, sometimes even their normal emotional expression. The war is one of the factors of patriarchy; as Woolf states in her review of “Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century”, “wars and ministries and legislation” were “invented presumably by gentlemen in tall hats in the forties who wished to dignify mankind” (Rosenbaum 361). Militarist politics, in particular, is related to women’s oppression, for women mostly are regarded as drudges or toys at that time. They have no reason to exist except to have sons for the Great War. “Women of Britain were urged to say to their man ‘Go!’ as in one of the best-known recruitment posters of the Great War, which shows a picture of the lady of the house, her female servant, and her child seeing off the soldiers from the window” (Hussey 152). Those women who can do nothing but only wait for their sons’, husbands’ and lovers’ return are eventually confronted with dying alone. No matter before or after that, they all have to continue to live with grief and pain. Thus, the war is a real reflection of the patriarchy’s oppression of women’s objectivity and sense of agency.

The end of the war doesn't mean people don't recall it anymore. At the beginning of the novel, London is under the cloak of the shadow of the war. One morning in mid June, Mrs. Dalloway goes out to buy flowers for her party. In the calm crowd of London, she still feels the pain brought by World War I that just ended: "The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 5). While shopping, Clarissa remembers her uncle "had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the War" saying "'I have had enough'" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 10). While walking along the street, she can still feel the grey: "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 9). The war has caused psychological injury to those people who left behind. As Herman notes, "the most common PTSDs are those not of men in war, but of women in civilian life" (Herman 8). The cruelty of war is something these women in the civilian cannot accept or even imagine. Stewart states like this,

Not only is the manner of death in war quite different – violent, random and mechanized – but its meaning is also complex. With regard to the First World War in particular, this seemed to be a kind of death that non-combatant women would be unlikely to suffer or to witness directly, but these losses were nevertheless being sustained for the salvation of a society and for principles in which Woolf for one had little faith. (Stewart 60)

Due to the war, many lower-class women became widowed, fatherless and brotherless. As an upper-class hostess, Clarissa has no direct war experience. She is just recovering from an illness while Britain is building itself in the aftermath of the war. Aristocratic women like Mrs. Foxcroft and Lady Bexborough above have to endure the corruption of their world; titles disappeared and the estates have to be sold, "Along with agriculture being depressed because of higher taxation and low rents, the loss of young heirs in the Great War deprived the landed gentry of their estates and titles. High taxation was initiated in the years before 1914... and by the end of the year over a million acres had been sold. Those who lost their country estates and who were involved in politics began to live in their town houses" (Hussey 153).

As for Clarissa, though she lives a marvelously rich life, she often falls into an indescribable fear and confusion, “She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. 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 taxi cabs, 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” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 8), “Then (she had felt it this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, she often feels she would perish ” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 158). Clarissa is a woman in contradiction who lives in the eternal struggle. The truth in her heart is like hot lava, constantly washing and cleaning her thoughts, which is eager to break through the shell of solid secular “human nature”. The shell also continually suppresses and fetters the surging lava, but suffers its agitation and collision at the same time, and is in danger of rupture at any time. It can be said that the general context of war and turmoil accelerated Clarissa’s inner contradiction and self-struggle. Similarly, it is also this turbulent context Woolf struggles in that urges her to pick up her pen to speak for herself.

The plot of the novel rises to a climax along with Clarissa’s realisation resonating with Septimus’ perseverant pursuit for the pure truth and beauty. Caruth holds that traumatic events have not been fully experienced or thoroughly understanding at the time of it occurs, but only experienced or understood in their insistent and intrusive return. The death of Septimus is like such a return. Clarissa is in a sudden illuminated when she hears the news of the suicide of Septimus at her party. Although they have never met, she feels that she understands his suffering and rebellion. She resonates and reproduces the moment of his fall and identifies with the martyred “scapegoat”: “Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 157). It’s a scene she imagines, but like her own experience. She realises that death is resistance, embrace as well as liberty.

Moreover, Clarissa understands Septimus’ gesture of defiance against the authoritarian society, especially the war, which has forced and devoured his soul. In the act of suicide,

Septimus has kept his autonomy, idealism and spiritual freedom. Clarissa's own life has been polluted by daily living. Her ideal and belief have been weakened and eroded in the gradual process of adaptation and compromise. However, she finally wakes up from her meditation. She knows she need to gain the power of existence from death, fight against loneliness and fear, and bring some of her true self back, "She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 159). To some extent, Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus are actually one person – Clarissa. As Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa shows a secular shell of human nature, while Septimus, who attaches importance to the freedom of inner authenticity, is Clarissa's true self.

In addition to the trauma caused by the war, the gender trauma derived from patriarchy also haunts Clarissa. Clarissa has to make sacrifices in order to adapt to the demands of the patriarchy. To get herself used to the restrictions of the traditional marriage, Clarissa has to give up her passion for Peter Walsh. "If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 41) "He's enchanting! Perfectly enchanting! Now I remember how impossible it was ever to make up my mind – and why did I make up my mind – not to marry him?" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 36) However, Peter is too jealous, possessive, and insecure even if his dynamic personality definitely enthralls her. Contrarily, Richard Dalloway is a member of Parliament in the Conservative government; he manifests 'a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit (*Mrs. Dalloway* 67). To maintain a easier life in material and to protect the "privacy" of the soul, Clarissa chooses Richard Dalloway but sleeps in a narrow bed in the attic. "For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable...she had to break with him...though she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 7-8). Clarissa chooses an attic room as a refuge from the traditional female role of Angel in the House (Patmore): "like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs...there was an emptiness about the heart of life... the sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 27). In spite of the appearance that Clarissa seemingly lives a happy life, she has been living in

the shadow of her husband and her own choice. “With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes – one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard Dalloway” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 67).

To some degree, Clarissa is a typical representative of the family women in the upper class under the oppression of patriarchy. She always takes the family as the center and regards her husband and daughter as the first place in her life, tries to play the image of a perfect lady expected by the upper class. Over time, it seems that becoming a good wife and a good mother has become the whole significance of her life, regardless of whether it is what she really wants or not. She depends on her husband in everything for she has no independent source of income. Although she is a woman with wisdom, she has to “observe things through his (Mr. Dalloway’s) eyes” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 67). Clarissa used to be a lively relaxed and lovely girl, who was full of curiosity and interest in everything in life but knew that her inner passion and rebellion would only bring some “awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 155) in this patriarchal society. Therefore, she has to hide her inner real self and return to the world where she has been packaged as the perfect hostess and socialite at the high-class banquet, striving for taking her social responsibility as the wife of a politician.

Dominick LaCapra divides trauma into historical trauma and structural trauma. LaCapra holds that historical trauma is a loss rather than “a sheer absence or utter annihilation” (LaCapra, *Trauma, Absence, Loss* 700), which is specific such as the death of family members from the personal sense or the Holocaust in a broader sense. As early as when she was young, Clarissa suffered from the tragedy that her sister Sylvia killed by a falling tree in front of her, which also brought her enormous trauma. According to Caruth, trauma is a sudden, disastrous and unavoidable experience in which “the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive” (Caruth 11). Clarissa’s behavior shows the “delay” of a traumatic experience. As an adult, Clarissa often remembers her sister: “a girl too on the verge of life, the most gifted of them” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 68).

When she was young, Clarissa falls in love with a girl, her greatest friend named Sally Seton. Woolf has mentioned that women don’t need to be ashamed for liking women, “Do not blush... Sometimes women do like women” (*A Room of One’s Own*, 36). However, in Britain in the 1920s, homosexual love was not accepted by the mainstream culture. Clarissa’s feeling



for Sally is discovered and ridiculed by her pursuer Peter. In the novel, Peter is bi-characteristic who not only represents Clarissa's inner pursuit of freedom but also the patriarchal society's negation and suppression of her emotion for the same sex. Clarissa feels that "It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 31). The granite wall is extremely hard and can't be broken, just like the oppression of patriarchal society. Every time Peter and Clarissa were together, he would always play with a pocket-knife. The knife is a symbol of male power. The appearance of Peter with the knife symbolises the oppression of the patriarchy; but Clarissa can only say this to herself: "For Heaven's sake, leave your knife alone!" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 40).

From the accidental death of her sister to the homosexual love that is not accepted by the secular world, the trauma from gender of Clarissa's experience is obvious. For the traumatised, sometimes a better way to heal the inner wound is to speak out the painful experience and have someone who can listen to you and empathise with you. E. Ann Kaplan argues that "telling stories about trauma, even though the story can never actually repeat or represent what happened, may partly achieve a certain 'working through' for the victim" (Kaplan 37). Generally speaking, the other one in the marriage can play the role of such a listener. However, Clarissa's husband cannot really understand her. And the relationship between Clarissa and her only daughter, Elizabeth, is not close either. She regards Miss Kilman, her daughter's history teacher, as her enemy and always thinks that Kilman is deliberately driving a wedge between Elizabeth and her. Besides, Clarissa also has some bad relationships with some other female characters in the book. Thus, middle-aged Clarissa lacks the love and support of all of her female friends. After suffering a lot, the traumatised often turn on self-defense mechanism and become numb. Clarissa in the novel lives like this day after day: she often feels that "this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all" "this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 10).

## **2.2 Lucrezia**

Septimus Smith is a veteran who suffers from shell shock in World War I. Before the war, he was an aspiring young poet and lover of Shakespeare. He enlists immediately after the war broke out, for his romanticism and patriotism in his bones, "Septimus was one of the first to

volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 74). In the war, at the beginning he develops his manliness and is promoted, becomes numb to the horrors of war. Therefore, when his good friend Evans is killed just before the armistice in Italy, he feels little sadness. At first, he is grateful for feeling little and being "reasonable". However, when he gradually finds "the notion of going to war to preserve civilization exposes the contradictory nature and violent basis of that civilization" (Stewart 59), and then one evening after the war, he suddenly finds himself cannot feel anything, he marries an Italian woman, Lucrezia in order to gain spiritual and psychological comfort.

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel. As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them; could hear them...scissors rapping, girls laughing, hats being made protected him; he was assured of safety; he had a refuge...he asked Lucrezia to marry him, the younger of the two. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 75)

Then, subsequently, the cruel war experience leaves him with permanent scars, causing his serious mental disorder. He feels that he had committed a crime against humanity, a crime of no feelings. He becomes extremely sensitive to the surroundings, which seems full of vitality and emotion, "leaves were alive"; "trees were alive" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 20), the sky shows him signals... Instead of helping Septimus to release from the war horror, Sir William Bradshaw (a so-called celebrated psychiatrist) offers him some senseless advice and a suggestion to separate Septimus from his wife and send him to a rest home in the country. To escape from the authoritarian force that would rape his consciousness and imprison his soul, Septimus commits suicide.

Septimus is indeed a victim of the war, however his wife, Lucrezia, is more a victim of both the war and gender (her marriage). Lucrezia is a war bride, a victim of war. She was brought to Britain as a symbol of male position, triumph, power, egotism and romanticism. When the war was over, she met Septimus in Milan at nineteen and followed him back to England. She suffers from loneliness, anxiety and dread. Worst of all, she cannot directly express her anger, frustration and depression because she is oppressed as a woman and also as a foreigner.

Lucrezia has nobody to tell her feeling except her husband, who has never felt something for her pain and commits suicide at last. She is such a young Italian girl at the age of twenty-four, who has been married to Septimus for five years, “a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 14). In her marriage, she gives up her home-country for her love of a man. After the Naturalization Act of 1844 in Britain, any foreign woman married to a British man would automatically become a British subject, that is, a citizen of the United Kingdom, and will be “consequently allowed to come to Britain free of all conditions” (Hussey 156).

However, the incitement of the war against aliens was reflected in both 1914 and 1919 Alien Restrictions Acts. The government discouraged foreign immigration to Britain, while encouraged British emigration to abroad. For example, Lady Millicent Burton’s project of encouraging young people to emigrate to Canada is stated in the novel. Lucrezia immigrates at a time when discrimination and agitation against aliens is at worst. “She was so simple, so impulsive, only twenty-four, without friends in England, who had left Italy for his sake, a piece of bone” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 15). However, Septimus just treats his marriage as a refuge. He confessed that he “had married his wife without loving her; had lied to her; seduced her” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 79). The madness of Septimus is mainly stated and focalised by his wife Lucrezia, this particular perspective manifests that Woolf’s intention to disclose women’s trauma caused by the war and gender injustice at that time.

From Lucrezia’s continuous stream of consciousness, we can see how the war traumatised her, “She could stand it no longer... Far rather would she that he was dead! She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible... To love makes one solitary, she thought... Look! Her wedding ring slipped – she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered – but she had nobody to tell” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 20-21). She keeps comforting herself: “Everyone gives up something when they marry. She had given up her home. She had come to live here, in this awful city” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 58). Caruth points out that the traumatic event possesses unaccountability and immediacy, that is, the difficulties of understanding and placing it in time and memory, “The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely ... in the collapse of its understanding” (Caruth 7), that’s how Lucrezia’s faith collapsed and agony erupted. Lucrezia can no longer be his light and tries her best to

accompany Septimus to find a bright way to live, because she has fallen into the struggle between her own “self” and “others”.

Lucrezia’s agony as well as the trauma she suffers is kept to herself, as she repeats “I am unhappy” all the time. Lucrezia is not a native English speaker, and she can only express self with simple words in English in Britain. However, her simple inner voice is strong and honest enough to tell the truth, that she cannot endure the present life anymore. After she was brought to Britain, Lucrezia has to speak in English; and Septimus cannot speak Italian and does not know even a simple Italian word. Thus, Lucrezia has neither her own voice nor a listener. She can only express her sorrow by her inner monologue.

Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, it’s wicked; why should I suffer? She was asking, no, I can’t stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn’t Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there... but for herself she had done nothing wrong; she had loved Septimus; she has been happy; she had had a beautiful home, and there her sisters lived still, making hats. Why should she suffer?” “But why should she be exposed? Why not left in Milan? Why tortured? Why? (*Mrs. Dalloway* 57)

It is because she is a woman and an outsider of that country, that society, that she cannot chase for what she really wants. While Septimus could express his agony of the divided self or the biased society by speaking, crying, writing or even making a suicide. Lucrezia cannot even cry but stops people in the street just to tell them “ I am unhappy”. Her simple words symbolise her inability to express her negative emotions, which originates from her unstable, unpleasant married life in a foreign country due to a war.

When Lucrezia states clearly that she wants a baby, she cries for the first time in front of Septimus during their five years of married life. But her husband still couldn’t feel anything. “At tea Rezia told him that Mrs. Filmer’s daughter was expecting a baby. She could not grow old and have no children! She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he

noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing (*Mrs. Dalloway* 78).

This hopeless sob reflects her fear and helplessness that she might be left alone without any family in the case of her husband's departure or death. We are also told that our protagonist, Clarissa had not had a child until she was thirty-five even though she married at eighteen. As a woman, she probably understands the source of Lucrezia's obsession. Or maybe it is also the writer's own obsession. In 1912, Woolf wrote a letter and told to her husband Leonard that, "I want everything – love, children, adventure, intimacy, work" (Rice 496). However, for the sake of Woolf's physical condition, Leonard and their doctors prohibited her from childbearing. Later, Woolf wrote to her friend Ethel Sands, "I'm always angry with myself for not having forced Leonard to take the risk in spite of the doctors" (Hussey 158).

Despite Lucrezia's disclosing of her true feeling, Septimus has never managed to understand her. He even cannot feel for her inner conflict. Septimus could enjoy "the intoxication of language" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 76) while he feels Lucrezia's words like that "sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 123) or hopes her voice "died out in contented melody" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 125). Even her simple repeated words like "Look," "Come," "It is time," are disruption for Septimus. But these words represent Lucrezia's great efforts to care for her husband. When Lucrezia could "say anything to him" beyond the language barrier, she feels "perfectly happy" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 125). That's the only happiness she has got since she got married. Her momentary happiness finally ends with Septimus's suicide. Now Lucrezia is really left alone without a child and family, in a foreign country. Worst of all, she is now confronted with the difficulty of returning to her homeland Italy, which is already under the fascists' control. "I am alone; I am alone! She cried...as perhaps at midnight, when all the boundaries are lost...when suddenly, as if a shelf was shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was his wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad! Turning, the shelf fell; down, down she dropped. For he was gone, she thought – gone, as he threatened, to kill himself" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 21). Whitehead mentions that the one of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is "the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot" (Whitehead 86), the repeated psychological depiction of Lucrezia has confirmed the extreme trauma she suffered in this marriage, precisely, because of the war.

### 2.3 Kilman

The appearance of Miss Kilman, another female character in the novel, also aroused Mrs. Dalloway's impulse to find her true self. Kilman is Elizabeth's (Clarissa's daughter) history teacher who is German by birth. Although Miss Kilman has a history degree, she was fired from her teaching position during the war because she cannot cover her true opinions about Germans.

She had never been happy. And then, just as she might have had a chance at Miss Dolby's school, the war came; and she had never been able to tell lies. Miss Dolby thought she would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans. She had had to go. It was true that the family was of German origin, but her brother had been killed. They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains – when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany! And after all, she could read history. She had had to take whatever she could get. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 106)

Though “her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 114), Kilman is confronted with a long-suppressed self regardless of possessing such a specialty of humanity subject. As Woolf remarks in “Women and Fiction” that “they are oppressed but neglected as the victims of men's war” (Rice 141), only the inner voice reflects their conflicts, of which cannot be heard by people and expressed in front of the public.

In 1914, the international anti-German movement became quite strong at a moment because Germans invaded Belgium and carried out a mass rape of women and young girls. The images of German soldiers and even of German women with cruelty and inhumanity were used as propaganda posters posed in the street. In London, shops with German names were ransacked and looted. This kind of people like Kilman is regarded as one of the most dangerous and unpleasant woman of that era. Moreover, as a radical Quaker pacifist with German ancestry, it is unlikely for her to admit that the Germans are “villains”. At the time, though most of the churches were in favour of the war, the Quakers opposed it because of their long traditions of pacifism and close connection with the suffragists, who made every effort to fight against

all forms of violence and ultimately against men's war. Although Kilman is a radical pacifist, she is still a particular kind of war victim who is caught in nationalistic discourses.

In spite of a highly educated woman and a the radical feminists against the war she is, Kilman still has no social status or discourse power towards the war. "Women's higher education began to be reformed and encouraged with the establishment of Queen's college for women in London in 1848 and of Bedford College in London in 1849. Many of the later feminist campaigners attended lectures at these two institutions. London University, especially, gave opportunities of higher education to middle and lower class women from all over Britain" (Hussey 160). Although this relatively equal educational reform that dated from the mid-Victorian era, women could not receive a degree and were prohibited from almost all the professions except for teaching. What is more, they had no opportunity to receive any university awards, scholarships or any form of financial fund. It was not until the twentieth century that they could use the university libraries. The University of Cambridge offered neither degrees nor university admission to women until 1948. During the war, the only occupation open to highly educated women and was regarded as the most respectable and suitable for women was teaching. Although Kilman has a degree in history, she can not teach at colleges or universities. Kilman thus is one of representations of women's segregation at work, which is rooted in a male-dominated society.

In a patriarchal society, men tend to believe that brains and beauty are incompatible for a woman. In the novel, Kilman's lack of beauty, wealth and social status, symbolising her in a deep-rooted patriarchal view, that is, a single, poor, independent woman without any social rank. "Do her hair as she might, her forehead remained like an egg, bald, white. No clothes suited her. She might buy anything. And for a woman, of course, that meant never meeting the opposite sex. Never would she come first with anyone... But one must fight... But no one knew the agony... Knowledge comes through suffering, said Mr. Whittaker" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 111). For Kilman, a well-educated knowledgeable woman, what she is really struggling with is that the unfair judgment upon her is that she is only treated as a "woman", not as a "soul". In the early twentieth century, most of leading educated professional women had the same anxiety and confusion as Kilman. They might be respected for their achievements, like Richard in the novel admits Kilman is an outstanding historian. However, Kilman also says to herself, "I'm plain, I'm unhappy" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 114). In the novel,

Kilman always wears a mackintosh, which symbolises a cover for herself as well as a barrier to block the happiness, just as Barral comments, “Her clothing is a clear indicator of repressed feelings that have to be endured with sacrifice and pain. Thus, an impersonal mackintosh becomes the symbol of her obscure life and her burdened mind” (Barral 10).

After the war, women were deprived of financial support due to the war deaths and the currency inflation. Single women even had to face the difficulty of finding a husband. “It is reported that in 1920, 63% percent of the female population in England and Wales were over twenty years old and only 38% percent of them were married” (Hussey 162). As for those most of single middle-class women, they had neither husbands nor economic independence. In the novel, Ellie Henderson, at the age of 50, is obsessed by “her panic fear, which arose from three hundred pounds’ income, and her weaponless state (she could not earn a penny)” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 144). Kilman is over forty and also remains single; she wears an unattractive mackintosh coat all the time without any charm, “Yes, Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh; but had her reasons. First, it was cheap; second, she was over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor. Otherwise she would not be taking jobs from people like the Dalloways; from rich people, who liked to be kind” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 106).

In spite of her social marginalisation, Kilman’s beliefs in peace are fairly firm. She works for many organisations for promoting world’s peace campaign. To some extent, Miss Kilman represents faith and idealism. She detests the secular society and measures the world with her strictest standards. Even if in a difficult situation, she is unwilling to bow to the rules and regulations set by the secular world.

Woolf finds that the female outsiders and female victims of the war are prone to be neglected and forgotten in the power struggle. To some extent, patriotism motivates war in order to protect a patriarchal society, as Woolf claims in *Three Guineas*, “War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost” (*Three Guineas* 11). In 1915, Altetta Jacobs, president of the Dutch Suffrage Society said in her opening speech of the International Congress of Women at The Hague, “We women judge war differently from men. Men consider in the first place the economic results, the cost in money, the loss or gain to national commerce and industries, the extension of power...we women consider above all



the damage to the race resulting from war, and the grief, the pain and misery it entails” (Hussey 163). I believe this is also what Woolf wants to confirm through her *Mrs. Dalloway*.

In brief, it seems that all of the three women have expressed that they are unhappy, at least more than once. Both war and the patriarchal society bring multiple trauma to these three female characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, of whose hearts have sprouted the pursuit of the true self, which is just like shimmer, shining into the part of Woolf’s dark, humid and shrinking spiritual world. All of these three women yearn for a strong independent personality in their minds, which suggests Woolf’s effort to break away from the oppression of trauma of social reality.

### Chapter Three *To the Lighthouse* – A Self-therapy Confronting Life

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) was written in her 40s, a mature period of her thought and art. It not only presents her mature stream of consciousness writing skills and the use of poetic language, but also reflects her personal ideological tendency and spiritual purpose. In her diary on May 14, 1925, Woolf mentioned her idea of *To the Lighthouse*, "This is going to be fairly short: to have father's character done complete in it; and mothers; and St Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in – life, death, etc" (Woolf, *Diary* 3). As an autobiographical novel, this work takes Woolf's family as the prototype to shape the Ramsays, and discusses her long-term feminist sensibility, time and space, life and death, and the war theme, which is a dark line and also cleverly laid in the work. Few scholars, however, have studied the ways in which trauma is central to the novel. One of the researches about trauma study in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* I found is a thesis called "Something Fishy: [Sniffing Out] The Shape of Trauma and Transformation in *To the Lighthouse*" written by Andrew Phelps, which mainly exposes "the site of trauma" in the novel and stresses the harm and trauma transformation come from the war and patriarchy society. And as I mentioned in the Introduction, in the essay "The First World War and Women as the Victims of War Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Novels", some researchers also pointed out that Woolf offers a depiction of gender polarisation and strengthens women as traumatised victims of the war in *To The Lighthouse*.

Like many other writers, Woolf projects her traumatic experience into her literary works to construct literary stories, shape characters, making her work more autobiographical. It is worth mentioning that as a writer who has been chasing for aesthetics and harmony in her work, Woolf's literary expression of trauma is not limited to her symptoms of depression, nor does she always indulge in the direct description and presentation of traumatic events and traumatic memories. Most of the time, she simplifies the traumatic events and tries to express her understanding, feelings and reactions to the events with the help of literary characters or scenes; sometimes she even sublimates the traumatic memory into a kind of beautiful human emotion, which makes the expression of trauma aesthetic. *To the Lighthouse* is such an important work of Woolf to express her mental trauma like this.

Combined with a series of thematic analysis, this chapter will be divided into three parts, separately exposing and discussing the trauma caused by the War, Death, and Gender Injustice in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* to the author and society at the time.

### **3.1 Trauma from War**

Since Woolf's husband Leonard commented Woolf as "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (Leonard 27), many people ignore the political points of view in Woolf's works, while actually she pays much attention to the ethical thinking and criticism of politics as well as the war in her works. Through *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf reflects people's desire for harmony and peace in the anxiety and trauma, and explores more extensive issues about human destiny and the meaning of life.

#### **A. Exposing the Cruelty of War by the Structure**

*To the Lighthouse* is divided into three parts: "The Window", "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse". On the surface, from the development of the plot, the novel still follows the traditional physical chronological order, and tells the changes of the Ramsays in the past ten years; but in fact, Woolf successfully uses psychological time in the setting of structure, breaks the boundaries of time and space, and adopts the cross narrative structure combining the past, the present and the future, which makes the whole work concise in narrative but full of tension. The first part only records the activities of a family in an evening, which takes up hundreds of pages; the second part of the ten-year span, instead, is intentionally condensed into about a few pages; then, the final part again, only describes some simple activities of a certain morning, but it accounts for around one third of the whole book. The simple scenes and diluted plots of the two parts (Part One and Part Three) are filled with a series of thoughts and memories of the characters; a few hours of physical time contains unlimited psychological time. However, the ten-year changes in the middle part are passing lightly by the author's deliberate objective description, forming a "Long – Short – Long" structure. This is just in line with the theme of "Peace - War - Peace" in the development of human society. This also reflects human nature: happiness, people always like to taste it over and over again; disaster, no one even dares to talk about it. The layout of the author's overall length is a reflection of this kind of mentality.

In fact, the development of human civilization is a process of alternation between peace and war, especially in Woolf's days. In the course of time, peace is the main theme and war is an episode. As described in the part I in the novel, the Ramsays' holiday at the seaside is peaceful and leisurely. Mr. Ramsay is thinking about philosophical proposition, Mrs. Ramsay is knitting socks for the children of the lighthouse keeper, the children are playing and friends are walking, painting outside the house... this ordinary but warm family life is a miniature of countless families in peacetime.

However, "Time Passes", within only few pages, ten years went by like an arrow. The darkness of war is overwhelming, and everything is shrouded in it. In the dark, Andrew, the eldest son, dies in the war; Prue, the eldest daughter, dies during a summer of an illness related to childbirth; and Mrs. Ramsay, dies suddenly one night. In the dark, the wind howls, and the sea roars, the house is deserted and overgrown with weeds; the war is mercilessly destroying the living beings. In Part Two, Woolf seems to use a dream to refer to the vicissitudes of the family in the past ten years, "So with the lamps all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began", "But what after all is one night? A short space" (*To the Lighthouse* 103-104), trying to indicate the development of human's inner space of mind by describing the changes of a place (physical space). Yi-Fu Tuan points that "Place is security, space is freedom" (Yi-Fu Tuan 3). By depicting a quiet night with only a few words, Woolf evokes readers' freedom of imaginative landscape of their inner mind. The chapter is also short, but connects the preceding and the following parts. This deep and immense darkness is the merciless reflection of war.

The scene described in Part Three is very similar to that in the Part One. Woolf's desire and hope for a peaceful life makes her deliberately lengthen the two parts and describe in detail people's inner thinking state in a peaceful and comfortable state. Generally, this kind of "subjective and real" description is warm and moving. In contrast, the objective and cold description in part II is relatively short, which implies Woolf's hatred and aversion to the war. The description of Andrew's death in the War is calm and restrained, making the cruelty of the war leap off the page. "... and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright and light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling. [A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully,

was instantaneous.]” (*To the Lighthouse* 109). The sudden thud breaks the peace. Woolf naturally contrasts war and peace without any farfetched surplus: the death of young people is followed by the rose and sunshine in midsummer, the cruelty of war and the beauty of peace form a strong imagery conflict. Therefore, the sonata-like structure is carefully designed by Woolf as the hidden thread, which conveys her desire for peace and her aversion to war to the readers.

#### B. Revealing the “Theme” of War by Using Metaphor

From the structure, *To the Lighthouse* adopts a “trilogy” of “Long-Short-Long”, which reveals the physical and mental trauma brought by the shadow of war. In the second part “Time Passes”, Woolf does not directly describe the tragic scenes of the war, but uses a lot of metaphorical techniques to imply the darkness and destructive power of the war.

First, Woolf chooses an ‘empty’ house. A lonely house lying in the seaside, which easily reminds me that description of Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space*, “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard 6). An invisible force of nature engulfs and at the same time, protects the house. Under the technique of personification, darkness envelops the whole house, and the sea breeze blows through the corners of the house: “Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin...” “Only through the rusty hinges and swollen sea-moistened woodwork certain airs, detached from the body of the wind (the house was ramshackle after all) crept round corners and ventured indoors” (*To the Lighthouse* 103). This technique gives readers a powerful visual stimulation and association. It seems that the actions of the dark forces in nature in the house coincide with the war breaking out in the vast world outside. In the darkness, the power of war is so destructive that it comes to the civilized society quietly and threatens the civilized life. In the darkness, Mrs. Ramsay passed away, the furniture and their owner disappeared, the laughter in the room before the war vanished. No one came here any more. There was no more lives in the room; only decay and death remain. The invisible power of nature symbolises the unpredictability and destruction of war. In the face of war, human beings look like so insignificant and vulnerable. In addition to the house, there are also a lot of other objects that Woolf chooses to as metaphors. For instance, descriptions of water can be seen everywhere

in *To the Lighthouse*. Poole has mentioned that in *To the Lighthouse*, water signifies “the deep pull of unconsciousness, easy death. Water is dissolution of the self in something greater than the self” (Poole 266-271).

Woolf’s use of metaphors in the following parts in Part Two also makes people feel like they are on the battlefield. For example, as I listed in the previous part, Woolf describes something drops in the silence before she mentions Andrew died in the war, making readers seem to hear the sound of guns. Then, she writes “There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship for instance, come, gone” (*To the Lighthouse* 109). “Ashen-coloured” indicates that it is a warship rather than a fishing boat, thus clearly symbolizing the war. In addition, there’s also a description of the house in this part: “The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it” (*To the Lighthouse* 112). The “shell” is supposed to be a sea shell. However, since people have heard the explosion of shells in France before, here they have heard the echo of the real war and seen the remains of the real war.

The use of metaphors in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* makes us seem to have heard and witnessed the tragedy of the first World War and people’s helplessness in the war. The rampancy of the dark forces, the ruthlessness of the sea breeze, the “shells” in the sand dunes, and the anshen-coloured ship across the sea all collide with readers’ fragile hearts, thus revealing the destructiveness and great trauma the war bring to the society at that time. Woolf uses only two sentences that constitutes the chapter six of Part Three, “Macalister’s boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his book with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea” (*To the Lighthouse* 148). With regard to this, Phelps indicates that Woolf uses different scenes and metaphors to show people the trauma caused by culture and customs in patriarchal society:

On the surface, the subject seems innocuous enough – a boy, name un-given, fishing. However, upon reaching the second sentence and the phrase, “the mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea...,” the innocence of this aside-seeming scene disappears, replaced by a visceral representation of trauma... The fact that the child is male is no accident. Woolf, through this scene, gestures to

the psychological and physical trauma perpetrated by culture and its conventions within a patriarchy – a society of easy sacrifice. (Phelps 28)

By this, I'd like to say that the metaphor of writing, especially in an autobiographical trauma writing itself indicates the writer's life experience and times, by which we can get a glimpse of the social panorama of that time and infer the writer's feelings, attitudes, intentions to get a better understanding of the work.

### C. The characterisation

Although Woolf tries to understate the plot narration and the characterisation in this novel, through a series of cross narration of the flow of characters' consciousness, we can still see the great influence of war on people's psychology and personality. After ten years of war, reality seems to have lost its meaning to everyone. Life seems to be illusory and at a loss. Everyone is inevitably growing up, from innocence to sophistication, from idealism to disillusionment.

Ten years ago, Mr. Ramsay was too rational and impersonal. He indulged in his illusory philosophical thinking all the time, was indifferent and impatient to his children, and always needed his wife's encouragement and comfort. When the youngest son James looked forward to going to the lighthouse, he rudely interrupted him, saying that the weather was bad and they couldn't go. James was full of resentment against him and felt that he was a selfish tyrant. On the other hand, James relied on his mother and resented his father's behavior of taking all his mother's attention as soon as he comes. James thinks that his father is like an axe or a knife, "he had brought his blade down among them" (*To the Lighthouse* 153), cutting off the connection between him and his mother. Lily Briscoe, had always wished to draw a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay, but failed in inferior under Mrs Ramsay's dazzling image. They were all deeply attracted by Mrs. Ramsay, who is a symbol of peace and warmth, and each of them had his or her own imperfection and immaturity.

Ten years passes, time flies, their spiritual pillar, Mrs. Ramsay has quietly passed away. The changes of the world and the baptism of the war make them mature in spirit and soul. Mr. Ramsay and James set foot on the journey to the lighthouse together to realize their dreams. James even feels in the boat that in the desolate wasteland, "there were two pairs of footprints

only; his own and his father's. They alone knew each other" (*To the Lighthouse* 151). The estrangement and resentment between father and son have disappeared. While Lily stands on the shore, looking at the boat far away from her, all kinds of past come to her mind together with Mrs. Ramsay, and she suddenly realizes that Mrs. Ramsay also own imperfection and immaturity. She is no longer inferior and hesitant. When the boat finally reaches the lighthouse, she gets inspiration and draws pictures that linger in her mind for many years. The war makes the society in chaos and brings huge impact on people; while at the same time, people can grow up quickly and be stronger after suffering from trauma. It seems to reflect Woolf's intention of creation: to seek unity in confusion and harmony in contradiction, to seek healing and growing in trauma.

### **3.2 Trauma from Death**

In her short life, Woolf witnessed many deaths, including her family, friends and even strangers, who died of disease, war or even hunger. In particular, the death of her parents was a great blow to her. In 1895, the death of her mother, Julia, caused her first mental disorder. The misfortune of her family is the eternal pain burying in Woolf's heart. She often missed and recalled them, expressed her sorrow for them through writing. Death, as an important theme in Woolf's works, runs through almost all her novels. Among them, the death of Mrs. Ramsay and Prue in *To the Lighthouse*, Jacob in *Jacob's Room*, and Percival in *The Waves* are all alluded to the death of Woolf's family. In addition to the direct death, the characterisation of Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay as well as the narration of the relationship between them in *To the Lighthouse* also reflect Woolf's recollection and catharsis of her traumatic experience left by her parents' death.

#### **A. Mr. Ramsay**

In Woolf's life, her father Leslie Stephen, was the person who had the earliest and deepest influence on her. When she wrote *To the Lighthouse*, Leslie had passed away for many years. Out of sympathy, missing and mourning for her father, she creates such a elegiac work with her father as the center. From her own traumatic experience, she successfully moulds a vivid image of her farther, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay is an intellectual professor of philosophy. Woolf describes him by using the metaphor of letters as this: It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a



piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q” (*To the Lighthouse* 30). With his excellent talent, he never listens to fate and is not blindly optimistic. He is always able to face the reality calmly. It also perfectly matches Woolf’s summary of her father’s image in “A Sketch of the Past”, “my father was spartan, ascetic, puritanical” (Moments 68). However, this kind of rational way of thinking, coupled with Victorian paternalism, makes him always pursue the truth accurately and strictly, regardless of other people’s feelings, and even harsh to be rough and savage. His excessive rationalisation is described in the work: “He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising... one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure” (*To the Lighthouse* 8). But this kind of ruthless character, autocratic thoughts, words and deeds make his children deeply disgusted and alienated from him.

But deep down, Mr. Ramsay often feels inferior. In essence, he yearns for great success in the field of knowledge and hopes him become the top. He divides successful people into two classes and distinguishes them clearly, “on the one hand the steady goers of superhuman strength who, plodding and persevering, repeat the whole alphabet in order, twenty-six letters in all, from start to finish; on the other the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash – the way of genius” (*To the Lighthouse* 31). He definitely yearns to be a genius, but also knows that he is not endowed with intelligence and wit enough and can only choose another way to succeed. Woolf describes Mr. Ramsay “had, or might have had, the power to repeat every letter of the alphabet from A to Z accurately in order. Meanwhile, he stuck at Q. On, then, on to R” (*To the Lighthouse* 31). However, as soon as he thinks that he might soon die and never reach R, he immediately becomes depressed, frustrated and decadent. Although he wins his wife’s admiration and worship, and is admitted Charles Tansley that he is the greatest metaphysician at that time, he is not satisfied and still keeps telling his wife that he is a “failure”. He needs to get more affirmation from others that he really has the talent. He is totally self-centered, always take infinite comfort and sympathy from others, especially his wife.

As the years went by, everything, everyone changed, including Mr. Ramsay. In part three of the novel, the tyrant with extreme thought and egoism is no longer in front of the readers. Ten years after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Mr. Ramsay accompanies the children to the lighthouse, fulfilling their long cherished wish. The journey to the lighthouse is his memorial to his dead wife, and also his understanding and care for children. As he told to old Macalister: "They would soon be out of it, but their children would see some strange things" (*To the Lighthouse* 167). Near the end of the work, Woolf's comprehensive display of Mr. Ramsay is complete and successful. Woolf's emotional attitude towards her father is always permeated in the image depiction of Mr. Ramsay in the whole work.

In real life, with the growth of age, children's understanding of their father is no longer as shallow and one-sided as in their early years. In 1903, Leslie's was seriously ill. Children of the Stephens felt a certain kind of love and guilt. Because they began to understand that their father do loved them. They have grown up. And their father really wanted to see what will happen to them in the future. He will no longer be a tyrant; and his faults and tyranny will be forgotten by them. What is left is his kindness, sharpness and wisdom. But as soon as this new and happy relationship had just begun, he should say goodbye to them forever. Among these children, Virginia Woolf is the saddest one. After her father died, she was full of sorrow and guilt. She thought she had never done enough for her father. When he was lonely, she never told him that she loved him and cherished him.

Woolf was already forty-five years old when she wrote *To the Lighthouse*. Obviously, her motive and purpose of this writing is not only to complain about her old man, but also to mourn and miss him, to make herself get out from the traumatic experience of the past. To a certain extent, Cam in the novel is the embodiment of Virginia. Woolf shows her contradictory feelings towards her father through Cam. When she first got on the ship, Cam was very dissatisfied with her father, and even accustomed to regard this trip to the lighthouse as another atrocity of her father:

He had borne them down once more with his gloom and his authority, making them do his bidding, on this fine morning, come, because he wished it, carrying these parcels, to the Lighthouse; take part in these rites he went through for his own

pleasure in memory of dead people, which they hated, so that they lagged after him, all the pleasure of the day was spoilt. (*To the Lighthouse* 136)

But when she got on the boat and saw his father sitting and reading in the boat, Cam could not help remembering how gentle he was when he was writing in the room. Now, she thought, “he was not vain, nor a tyrant and did not wish to make you pity him” (*To the Lighthouse* 155). She even wanted to shout to James, “Look at him now” (*To the Lighthouse* 155). Cam’s new understanding of Mr. Ramsay also reflects Woolf’s re-examination of his father after his death. It is because of Woolf’s sympathy, guilt and grief for her father, and also with the wish that she tries to re-understand and analyse her father that she can give him a comprehensive and fair evaluation from a more objective standpoint. Her view of her father is no longer extreme and one-sided. For Woolf, the portrayal of Mr. Ramsay is a thorough psychotherapy, a spiritual purification.

#### B. Mrs. Ramsay

In addition to creating the image of father, Woolf also portrays an image of her mother in *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsay has an obvious corresponding relationship with Virginia Woolf’s mother Julia. Mrs. Ramsay has eight children; Julia also looks after eight children. Julia dutifully takes on the role of wife and mother, educating children, taking care of family, especially her husband Leslie. She is a manager who take good care of not only his physical condition but also his mental world, just as same as Mrs. Ramsay.

For Woolf, the death of her mother Julia is undoubtedly a devastating bereavement. Young Virginia believes that it is the deepest disaster that can happen to her. Probably out of the same reason – overwork, Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* died one night. Lily’s thoughts that she cannot get rid of about Mrs. Ramsay and her unfinished paintings are one of the most impressive in the work. However, as soon as Lily realised Mr. Ramsay’s boat arrived at the lighthouse, she was relieved and immediately turned to her canvas to draw a final line in the centre. Finish the picture. “I have had my vision” (*To the Lighthouse* 170). At that time, in her view, it was under the spiritual inspiration of Mrs. Ramsay that her family were able to arrive at the lighthouse smoothly. In her mind, the strength of Mrs. Ramsay’s personality has won an overwhelming victory, defeating her imperfection. Therefore, she finished her painting with one central line, making Mrs. Ramsay and her spirit permanent.

Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* embodies a strong feature of immortality. She lives in the memory and inheritance of the living, and exists in the eternal art paintings. She surpasses death, and her character of lenience, selflessness and tolerance will shine forever. Woolf condenses her memory of her mother into Mrs. Ramsay, and her traumatic feeling of losing her mother is sublimated into a recalling of seeking solace from creation.

Traumatic experience urges Woolf to seek what she lacks in real life in the literary fantasy world. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf only gives a very brief account of Mrs. Ramsay's death in the brackets: "She had died very sudden at the end" (*To the Lighthouse* 111), but tries to express her understanding and reactions to her parents' deaths with the help of the life scenes of Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay. On this basis, Woolf's trauma brought by the death of her family is sublimated into a noble and aesthetic memory: Mrs. Ramsay died, but her immortal personality charm stayed, reflecting the confrontation and transcendence for realistic death.

Woolf chooses to avoid the description of death in the work, but she is not disappointed at the world. In the novel, deep love and compassion of humanity are well exposed; the whole novel embodies the profound humanistic care and the pursuit of harmonious interpersonal relations. By creating literary images, Woolf pours out her traumatic experience of death and her nostalgia for her dead parents, so that, release her long-standing sadness. Woolf crosses the trauma from death in the way of an artistic imagination, fulfills her wish difficult to realise, which is a further healing and the redeeming of her fragmented self.

### **3.3 Gendered Trauma**

In the late 19th century, the Victorian British upper class society was strongly characterised by the patriarchal norms, the prevailing ideal female model, and the privilege of education for males. The Stephens, who lives in No. 22, Hyde Park Gate Kensington London, is a typical intellectual aristocratic family in Victorian era. As a young lady of the Stephens. Virginia Woolf has witnessed and deeply experienced all kinds of moral standards and life styles of Victorian aristocratic families. As a girl, she had no chance to receive a formal school education, but was incestuous abused by her half brother. All this casted the shadow of gender trauma on her mind, thus she chose to accuse and resist in the world of literature.

Showalter identifies three phases for women writers: Feminine, Feminist, and Female: “Feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1940s to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960” (Eagleton 13). Woolf is exactly in the transitional stage between Feminine phase and Feminist phase. That is also her “awakening time”. She created lots of masterpieces around that time, which especially presented her ideas of emphasising the unique female consciousness and the unique value of women. Woolf’s thought of gender has attracted much attention in the academic circle, and has become the highlight of the study on her. On the basis of previous scholars’ achievements, combined with Woolf’s own traumatic experience, I would analyze the embodiment of gendered trauma in Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*.

#### A. Questioning of Traditional Education and Position for Women

Men and women were unequal in education in Victorian Britain. In aristocratic families, people take it for granted that boys received formal and systematic school education, and then were sent to the enviable universities like Cambridge and Oxford, while girls can only stay at home, receive family education, become versatile women and then wait for the fate of marriage. Since Woolf and her sister were self-educated at home while her brothers were able to receive formal education at school, Woolf’s father Leslie could not get rid of the patriarchal prejudice of that era either. With the growth of age, sensitive Woolf was not satisfied with father’s different educational methods for her brothers and their girls. She recalled it in the essay “A Sketch of the Past”, she and her sister “could and indeed must, sit passive and applaud the Victorian males when they went through the intellectual hoops” (*Moments of Being* 154).

Starting from her own gender trauma, Woolf criticised the whole patriarchal system. She indignantly pointed out that until the early 19th century, most middle-class women were unknown, except for a few aristocratic women who were able to excel. This is mainly because women cannot enjoy equal educational rights with men. She believes that the education of middle-class men is often at the expense of women’s right to education. In *Three Guineas*, she mentioned this about the education in Britain: “Ever since the thirteenth century English families have been paying money into that account... It is a voracious receptacle. Where

there were many sons to educate it required a great effort on the part of the family to keep it full” (*Three Guineas* 4).

Thus Woolf responds her indignation to resort to writing. She depicts different kinds of female figures to awaken women. Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* plays the role of “Angel in the House”, which is a traditional position stipulated by male society for women. She is beautiful and elegant, maintains the traditional female identity to regard looking after family and friends as the center, and even connives at her husband’s autocracy and tyranny. However, like Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mrs. Ramsay is full of emptiness and fear of life, which also comes from the lack of self. All her life, she pursues the duty of serving men and especially adores her husband, and is unconditional obedient and selfless dedicated to him. She identifies with the convention and norms which firmly bind her and internalizes them as her own standard. Also like Clarissa, only in the dead of night or sitting alone and meditating, can she feel the existence of her true self.

Compared with the representative traditional woman Mrs. Ramsay, Lily could be regarded as a “deviant” in the patriarchal society, which also determines that she must realise herself through a lonely and bumpy road. How to break through the limitation of women’s status and realize the self-value through the artistic creation is always the theme of Lily’s inner self-talk. At the beginning of the novel, Lily is a already single woman in her 30s. Lily has “her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face she would never marry” (*To the Lighthouse* 17). Undoubtedly, Lily is not a good-looking young lady; 33 years old, still unmarried, and engaged in the art of painting. From the perspective of traditional patriarchal criticism, such a woman who lacks beauty and charm and property has no right to walk out of marriage and family, and then take the painting which belongs to male privileges as her lifelong career. As a result, Lily is supposed to be disparaged and attacked by men and traditional women. When Lily paints, Mr. Tansley’s assertion that “Women can’t paint, women can’t write...” (*To the Lighthouse* 42) is always whispering in her ear; when Mr. Ramsay bearing down on her every time, “ruin approached, chaos approached” (*To the Lighthouse* 123); even Mrs. Ramsay said that “one could not take her painting very seriously” (*To the Lighthouse* 17), and exhorts her that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (*To the Lighthouse* 43), trying to pull Lily back from her impractical painting career to real life.

Faced with the attack and exclusion from the patriarchal society, Lily does not give up her resistance. She has fought back with her own practical actions. While others are shouting to her, “Women can’t paint” and there is no visible hope of success, Lily still insists on painting and her passion for creation hasn’t faded away for ten years. When Mrs. Ramsay constantly nag about “marriage” and create opportunities for Mr. Bankes and her, she is still “gathering a desperate courage she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself” (*To the Lighthouse* 43). Although Lily has had hesitation and confusion, she does stick to her principles for her ideal life, which breaks a traditional definition of women’s life.

Women’s education and women’s living conditions in the Victorian have always been important concerns of Woolf, and also the important themes of her creations. In addition to the focus in the novel, in her prose *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf also sharply satirises the unequal gender education at that time by setting the metaphor of Shakespeare and his imaginary sister Judith. But although there is a tough road for women artist and women education, and even Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge that there is a huge gulf between vocation and gender in front of women, “for the woman poet, in other words, the contradictions between her vocation and her gender might well become insupportable, impelling her to deny one or the other, even (as in the case of Judith Shakespeare) driving her to suicide” (Eagleton 111), Woolf always insists on creating her ideal female characters to fight back the unfair treatment women received by her pen. And we could also find that Woolf’s description of women’s education and life, the revelation and negation of the traditional way of women’s education, and the criticism of women’s traditional positioning originate from her own traumatic experience that she was deprived of the right of school education and could only accept closed family study. In other words, it is a kind of implicit indictment, mourning and venting of this traumatic experience.

## B. Resistance to Sex and Marriage

In addition to the shadow of great “patriarchal machine”, Virginia Woolf suffered from the other one spiritual harm from the family, incestuous abuse. There are a lot of data that show that her two half brothers Gerald Duckworth and George Duckworth have made indecent assaults on Woolf. Woolf also mentioned it like this in her essay, “I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes... I remember how I hoped that he would stop...But it did

not stop” (*Moments of Being* 69). Lily’s apprehension about marriage in *To the Lighthouse* also stems from the earlier incestuous abuse Woolf suffered, as well as her dissatisfaction with male-dominated society. Additionally, the traditional female education she received, the tyranny of father and the silent dedication of mother all made her realise the harm and tragedy of becoming a conventional wife-character in the family.

After the stimulation from gender trauma and the influence of Bloomsbury group, Woolf develops the idea of pursuing freedom, equality and independence, and produces a new concept of love and marriage. The distant lighthouse in the novel actually corresponds to a ideal life in the distance Lily yearns for. Woolf doesn’t tell about Lily’s life in London in the past years; I dare to guess an ending of Woolf’s hope for is that Lily can make a living from painting years later, though it could not be quite well off. There’s no exact explanation why she doesn’t marry Mr. Banks, in fact; but actually we could tell that she would not marry him from the very beginning – when they had a walk together that day, from that time she watched the Ramsays playing a ball – “So that is marriage. A man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball” (*To the Lighthouse* 60), she thinks. She will not be satisfied with this kind of life. Ten years later, when Lily finally finishes the last stroke on the canvas and clearly realises the brand-new images of Mrs. Ramsay and herself, she definitely affirms her persistence for years, “she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation” (*To the Lighthouse* 144), that is, also an affirmation of her self-worth. Lily’s ten years’ understanding of the Ramsay is not only her deep understanding of gender and marriage, but also her firm pursuit of an independent and free life. This is an artistic summary of the gender trauma about what Woolf has suffered after her deep thinking.

### C. Identification of Female Relationship

Suffered from a series of gendered trauma, Woolf shows her strong dissatisfaction with male hegemony, and turned to seek a comfort between the same sex to some degree. She once said frankly in her *A Room of One’s Own*, “Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women” (*A Room of One’s Own* 36 ). In her real life, Woolf has developed very close relationships with several women. This is her daily release and response to her own gendered trauma,



which has become an important part of her literary works. For Woolf, the affirmation of relationship between women to a certain extent means the negation of the relationship of the opposite sex, and this negation is related to her traumatic experience of gender. Therefore, her writing about the relationship among women is essentially an indirect artistic expression of her gendered trauma experience.

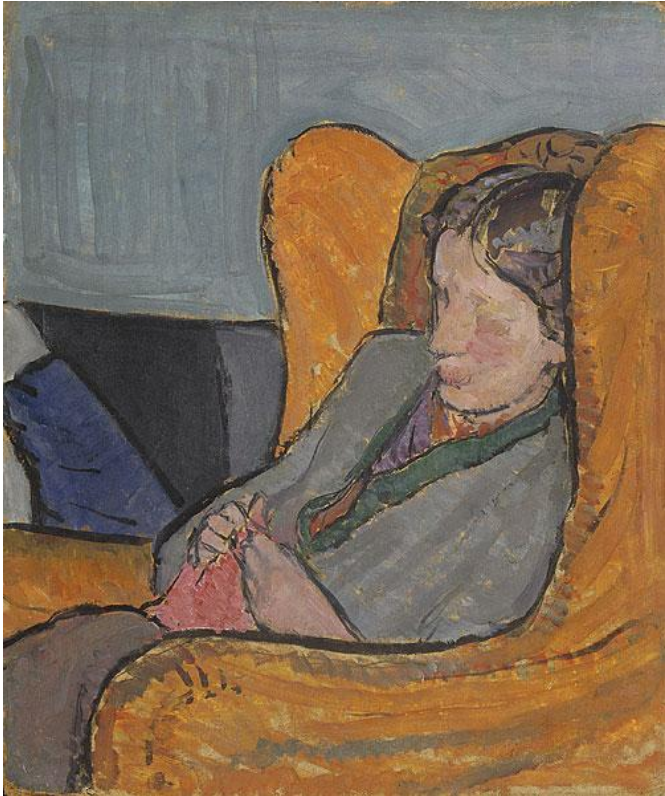
In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily and Mrs. Ramsay also have a deep friendship, and there is probably no lack of an “adoration”. They often sit together, and sometimes Lily even puts her arms around Mrs. Ramsay’s knees, chatting and comforting each other. Lily admires the power of Mrs. Ramsay’s personality; and somehow Ramsay is also attracted by Lily – that unique temperament in her. After Mrs. Ramsay’s death, Lily couldn’t get rid of her missing. Even ten years later, Mrs. Ramsay’s image often appeared in front of her face, and sometimes she even feels that she is sitting on the beach side by side with Mrs. Ramsay.

The oppressed status of women in the male society prompted Woolf to think deeply about the relationship between the two sexes. In her view, it is the unfairness between men and women that often limits and biases men’s understanding of women. Only women can truly understand women. With the help of Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, she spoke highly of this feminine comradeship: “was the purity, the integrity”, “It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 36). Woolf’s identification and writing of the relationship between women to some degrees means her questioning and negation of heterosexual love. This kind of creative thought from views of gender is also undoubtedly the twists and turns of trauma imprint in her heart from male society.

With her writing talent, Woolf chooses to express trauma in the world of literature. She directly or indirectly projects her gendered traumatic experiences and feelings on literary characters, and constructs a literary content full of gendered trauma. Some scholars think that ‘Woolf’s woundedness becomes an identity, and her utterances mere symptoms of her abuser’s power’ (Detloff 26). I doubt this because I believe her discourse, her words are the cornerstone of keeping her real self and moving forward. Moers claims that it’s “not loyalty but confidence was the resource that women writers drew from the possession of their own tradition” (Eagleton 9). Showalter also answers how the vocation of writing itself changes

the women writers; she points out three phases that women writers will go through: Imitation and Internalisation, Protest and Advocacy, and Self-discovery. And I believe that Woolf has realised early the internalisation and protest on her road of art, and achieved a self-discovery and self-identity. Therefore, the interpretation of Woolf's works from the perspective of gendered trauma can no longer be limited to some previous research conclusions, that believed the female writers are only blindly aimed at expressing their strong dissatisfaction with patriarchy. Woolf's trauma writing is more meaningful for her to regulate emotions and relieve her pain.

## Chapter 4 “Moments of Being” in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* – Woolf’s Trauma and Writing for Healing



In the introduction to Virginia Woolf’s *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, Jeanne Schulkind shared her explanation of this term ‘moments of being’, “One such belief was mentioned that the individual in his daily life was cut off from ‘reality’ but at rare moments received a shock” (*Moments of Being* 17). These shocks or ‘moments of being’ are symbols of some real things behind appearances. Woolf also extends it in her autobiographical writing as “This idea of a privileged moment when a spiritually transcendent truth of either personal or cosmic dimensions is perceived in a flash of intuition is a commonplace of religious experience and in particular of mystical traditions of thought, as well as a recurrent feature of idealist philosophies from Plato onwards” (*Moments of Being* 17).

As I mentioned in the last few chapters, Woolf suffered a lot in her life. Unfair educational opportunity, incestuous abuse in childhood, deaths of her family, social gender injustice, the cruelty of war and so on, which all lead Woolf to a mental state of constant alienation, or nothingness. According to Herman, “Besides the symptoms of PTSD, the traumatized also suffer from two psychological traumas: disconnection with self and disconnection with others” (Herman 52). Woolf’s state of alienation and nothingness is something like this. In “A Sketch of the Past”, Woolf mentioned she had been stuck with a feeling which “leads to a digression, which perhaps may explain a little of my own psychology; even of other people’s. Often when I have been writing one of my so-called novels I have been baffled by this same problem; that is, how to describe what I call in my private shorthand – “non-being”. Every day includes much more non-being than being” (*Moments of Being* 70). This is also another explanation and response to “one’s daily life was cut off from reality” from Woolf, who felt hard to get through from what she had suffered.

In her writing, meanwhile, Woolf set her belief in a particularly personal context and showed it emerging from her own strong and extreme individual susceptibility, it is the fundamental conviction of what she found in her own life and the meaning she created in the novel:

From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are part of the work of art. ... we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. (*Moments of Being* 72)

These words suggests that for Woolf, the search for her own identity, being, or further the existence of her characters could not be separated from the reality, either the reality in her own life or that in which those figures under her depiction or existed in her mind.

After that, several questions were repeatedly posed by the female characters of her two novels: What is life? What is love? What is reality? Who am I? *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* provide a context for the analysis for these questions. In *Moments of Being*, this self that “inhabits the finite world of physical and social existence” (*Moments of Being* 18) is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes an integrated part of a greater

universe from which it cannot be discriminated. For Woolf, “when the self merges with reality, all limits associated with the physical world cease to exist” (*Moments of Being* 18).

The authenticity of novels is one of the characters of modernist esthetics. This authenticity contains contradictory factors, both objective and subjective. Based on objectivity, writers withdraw from the novel in order to conform to the objective truth. Then, modernist novelists accept more arbitrary contingency of real life. They neither describe the whole process in an orderly way nor lead the event to a planned ending, which is closer to objective reality. In modernist novels, lastly, an accident can trigger a series of associations and consciousness processes, which are expressed in a natural method under the writers’ pen; it is also based on objective reality.

Woolf believes that reality is objective, but people feel different about the same objective reality. People’s sense of reality varies with the changes of the times and the differences of positions and views. Woolf uses the term “reality” a lot in her writing, which does not refer to the external objective reality, but refers to people’s inner feelings of the objective reality and refers to the internal truth or ultimate truth obtained after people’s consciousness refines the perceived objective reality. Woolf emphasises the diversity of reality, that is, the diversity of people’s feelings and views on reality. She once mentioned that “there is nothing that people differ about more than the reality of characters, especially in contemporary books” (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 10).

Woolf also discussed the reality and truth in her essay “A Room of One’s Own”, she said reality “seem to be something very erratic, very undependable...but whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent” (*A Room of One’s Own* 134), she believes that reality is the instantaneous impression and the fleeting and eternal memory of the past. It is also what we get after simplifying and refining this impression and memory, which also seems to be changeable and unpredictable. And then she answered her own question about how to grasp the truth in writing with “What one means by integrity, in the case of the novelist, is the conviction that he gives one that this is the truth” (*A Room of One’s Own* 135 ), confirming her subjective initiative in the creation.

In both portraying those female characters who walked all the way from the suffering and reflecting on her own trauma, Woolf noted “I almost always have to find a scene; either when I am writing about a person, I must find a representative scene in their lives; or when I am writing about a book, I must find the scene in their poems or novels” (*Moments of Being* 142). Schulkind also mentioned this in the introduction to *Moments of Being* that “Many of her (Virginia Woolf) novels are similarly organized; that is, scenes, characters, images and so on, that might initially appear to have been selected arbitrarily are subsequently revealed to be pieces of the hidden pattern” (*Moments of Being* 20). These scene making, characterization as well as the images representations are important and also the major approach in my analysis of the moments of being of characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

#### **4.1 Loss and Transcendence – Moments of Being of Mrs. Dalloway**

Mrs. Dalloway, also Clarissa, the eponymous character of this novel, is bearing similarities with Virginia Woolf in terms of both temperament and mind. Clarissa allows her thought mind wandering to the past, with a lingering of love and life; she thinks about life and death just as Virginia Woolf did and reaches her own moments of being. Love and life were two subjects Mrs. Dalloway has meditated on. During those important moments of being in her life she manages to recognise and seize the meaning of life, and establishes the core of her true self.

Clarissa is keen for love, but refused to be the prey of it. During the day on which she is going to hold her party, she tries to recall her relation and affection with three persons who has been intimate with her at different times and in different situations.

With Peter, who had been her former lover, they shared everything with each other. But Peter’s possessive love was intolerable to Clarissa finally and drove her away, she left and turned to her current husband Richard. her present husband. Peter’s suffocating love imposed a kind of captivity upon Clarissa who had every intention of pursuing freedom and dreaded of being dominated when she was that young. There, Clarissa’s fight to get rid of Peter’s unbearable dominating affection distinctly represents Virginia Woolf’s horror of captivity. On the contrary, Clarissa’s husband offered a comparatively broad space for her to create her

own relatively independent world. She believed “in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 10). But that’s just the beginning. Later on, when she considered her marriage, some problem stuck there, which also reflected and tortured Woolf all her life. No matter Clarissa or Woolf, she just lose her freedom completely, “Lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment... when through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 46).

Through depicting Clarissa, to some extent Woolf liberated her guilt in her loving husband Leonard Woolf and her abhorrence towards sexual intimacy. The comparison of Clarissa to be a “nun” indicates Woolf’s propensity of being a virgin in mind. In reality, Woolf’s marriage also once posted serious problems and almost drove her to the verge of a nervous breakdown; marriage for Clarissa and Woolf sometimes is also a failure and catastrophe, but both of them can not lose it, or who they loved. Whereas, Clarissa’s affection for her girlfriend Sally added some flourishing meaning in her life. It was Sally who give her feeling of being sheltered and truly independent. Besides, Clarissa considers the difference between her feeling for Sally and for men: “The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It Was not like one’s feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 50).

Clarissa wants love; but the love should be protective rather than possessive, pure rather than carnal. This is the true picture of Clarissa’s mind; so it is also of Virginia Woolf’s. From this sense, Clarissa was a representative spokesman of Virginia Woolf, with regard to her attitude toward love and life (freedom), which is what Woolf chased for all the time.

As Clarissa recollects her affection for her lover, friend and husband, she comes to understand her life as well. She starts to ponder on the meaning of her life, tries to establish the sense of being and finally successfully transcends herself. There are a few lines indicating that Clarissa had once lived a life of non-being and nothing, the same of which possessed Woolf for most of her life time:

But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), 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. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 14)

As I mentioned before, Woolf wrote this in “A Sketch of the Past” that she has been baffled by a feeling, that is, “how to describe what I call in my private shorthand – “non-being”. Every day includes much more non-being than being” (*Moments of Being* 70), and she holds that even those common separate moments of being in daily life like reading a book, having a cup of tea are “embedded in many more moments of non-being”, “A great part of every day is not lived consciously” (*Moments of Being* 70).

Under this circumstance, whoever Clarissa or Woolf is the one who lives in a state of non-being, and who could not live with herself as the center of her world, wherever she goes or whatever she does, she seems to be unable to find herself and had no sense of self at all. Clarissa lost herself in the flow of people, drifting back and forth like the rootless weeds in the torrent. She had been swallowed by the society and the world. This is also what Woolf really worried about for herself. But, through this figure under Woolf’s pen, we also found that only “when some effort, some call on her to her self” drew her parts together (*Mrs. Dalloway* 55), could Clarissa compose herself for a fleeting moment. It seems that she has never for one minute given up the effort to pursue her sense of being. Even if perplexed and disturbed by the worldly life, the sense for freedom and independence begins to awaken in Clarissa. And from the bottom of her heart Clarissa begins to question the life she had been living.

During these moments of being, I can tell that Clarissa moved towards the truth and sublimity step by step. Her aspiration for the sense of being is inspired and she would no longer be fooled by the hypocrisy and vices of the world, no matter how enchanting and brilliant they were. She seems to escape from the muddle of non-being and nothingness. Near end of the novel, the news of Septimus’s death disrupted Clarissa’s thoughts. When she finally regains



herself, Clarissa looks out of the window, but to her great surprise, she sees an “old lady stared straight at her” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 174). The old lady is the very image Clarissa will become. In a sense, she sees herself in this old woman. This sentence could be a suggestive of decaying and death, the same as Clarissa’s empty bed and narrow attic; it is also probably a suggestive of transcendence and newborn, because she finally ascends beyond her physical being in these moments of being in spiritual terms.

At the end of the novel, the news of Septimus’s death disrupted Clarissa’s thoughts. She was thinking about survival and death. When she finally recovered, Clarissa looked out of the window, but to her surprise, she saw an “old lady staring at her” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 174). The old lady is exactly what Clarissa will be. In a sense, she saw herself in the old woman. This sentence may imply decay and death, just like Clarissa’s empty bed and narrow attic; it may also be a hint of transcendence and rebirth, because she finally transcended her material existence at these moments of spiritual existence.

In addition, some Chinese critics assert that the party of Clarissa in the novel is only a pale aesthetic redemption and has no practical social significance because Mrs. Dalloway returns back or never get out of from her mire of life. However, in my opinion, both Clarissa’s parasol she takes when she goes out and the party she holds are important means for her to get out of the trauma and rebuild herself. Woolf uses a parasol to resist the scorching sun in reality, and a party to comfort the post-war wounded soul. She endows the private banquet with positive social significance. When Woolf first wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*, it was originally arranged to an end with Clarissa’s suicide. Later, Woolf used Septimus’s death to replace Clarissa’s despair, and the tone of the whole novel also changed from desperation to hope. At the end of the novel, Clarissa returns to the party, which also implies that after thinking about death, she is actively involved in social life again. This kind of ending arrangement also highlights Woolf’s healing from the creation of this novel. The author may not actively embrace life, but at least she has been released and liberated from something.

Through writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf found it was feasible to relieve her burden by projecting her own story onto her characters. Particularly, we find in the character Clarissa that Woolf was more than able to simply lessen the weight of trauma on her mind, that there had already been moments of conscious thinking, reflection upon the past, and budding of

pursuit for wholeness in Woolf's mind, which was duly revealed by the figure Mrs. Dalloway. Therefore Woolf's moments of being had already lurched on the way, showed through characters.

#### **4.2 Truth and Beauty – Moments of Being of Lily Briscoe**

In *To the Lighthouse*, it is also easy to find that Woolf's moments of being came to flourish among her characters, especially in Lily Briscoe, who harbours a strong wish to get enlightenment during serious meditation, to tell clear from vague, to find her own belief and to seek anchor for her life.

The plot of *To the Lighthouse* seems extremely simple: The Ramsay family and their friends were vacationing in their summer home in an island. Mrs Ramsay promised her six-year-old son James that if it was fine the next day, they could take a boat to visit the lighthouse standing on the rocks in the sea. Because of the bad weather, James's wish to go to the lighthouse never came true that summer. After the end of World War I, the Ramsays and their guests revisited the island. James finally got his wish and sailed a boat with his father and sister to the lighthouse. But as the years passed and things changed, Mrs. Ramsay had already passed away.

Without too much detailed story plot, it seems that Woolf told us a simple story. But in fact, through the accurate depiction of a series of characters, the author attempts to explore the meaning of life and the essence of self in the novel. Woolf actually raises two questions: First, is it possible for the self to recognise and grasp the truth in a disorder and then establish a certain order in a chaotic era? Secondly, is it possible for the self to escape from the dominance of time and remain immortal despite the threat of death?

Woolf puts forward these questions through the mouth of Lily and also other characters, and gradually presents the answers through the development of the plot. Mrs. Ramsay seeks the truth and builds an order in her small circle of her family and friends. Even though her success is limited: her most valued child died in the war, the marriage with her favour broke down, Lily and Mr. Banks did not marry as she wished and so on. Mr. Ramsay also seeks the truth and order in the kingdom of reason, but his philosophical research is always limited to the

letter “Q” or “R”, which he finds it difficult to go beyond. Lily’s painting is conceived in her mind for ten years and finally completed, but she has no confidants to appreciate. Individual ability is limited after all, but as long as people can sincerely pursue and explore within their respective capabilities, life is still meaningful. This is Woolf’s answer to the first question.

In the second part ‘Time Passes’, chaos, silence and death appear to have the upper hand; Mrs Ramsay passed away and all her efforts seemed to be in vain. However, at the end of the novel, the image of Mrs. Ramsay reappears. Lily completes her painting and Mr. Ramsay arrives at the lighthouse, which shows that the light of personality of Mrs. Ramsay shines in people’s memory like a lighthouse. On the whole, love triumphs over death, and human’s struggle triumphs over the passage of years, which is exactly a process of trauma healing. This is also Woolf’s answer to the second question.

On the other hand, *To the Lighthouse* embodies some chaotic essence of life in the society at that time. Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are all well aware of the chaotic and disorderly atmosphere surrounding them. They are assailed by chaos but try to explore some laws and establish a certain order, just as Mrs. Ramsay’s social contact art and Lily’s painting art to pursue the same goal – to organise the chaotic daily life in an orderly manner, so as to explore the meaning of life as well as the inner truth hidden under the appearance.

Thus for Lily, she must paint, for she is also driven by a “sense of reality”. She feels that she has to show it with color and shape. She tried to use art to create an orderly, stable and solid appearance for the chaotic and changeable life. For her, a brush is “the one dependable thing in a world of strife, ruin, chaos” (*To the Lighthouse* 124). It is the painting that makes her feel “In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability” (*To the Lighthouse* 133). Lily also believes “‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint” (*To the Lighthouse* 147). Therefore, it’s inconsequential whether Lily’s painting is hung in the hall or thrown under the sofa; just like the poet’s words, as long as it sincerely underlines some internal “truths”, it will achieve the goal.

At the same time, in this novel, Woolf consciously made a bold step in facing the past, talking about it and trying to combine it with the present time. That is the scene where The Ramsay

gets to the lighthouse as well as Lily completes her painting in the last episode of the novel. This scene could be said to be the most forceful in reiterating Woolf's wish to connect the past with the present so as to make her life a coherent whole, rather than a disrupted and split one. At the last scene, all the people seem to find the lighthouse in their minds, to speak with themselves so as to realise where they were and who they were at that time, to get to the truth of all these years and know what they had undergone, and what their changing lives are. At the end of the novel, there are some descriptions about each person like this, "What do you want? they both wanted to ask. They both wanted to say, Ask us anything and we will give it you...(for Cam and James) He sat and looked at the island and he might be thinking, We perished, each alone, or he might be thinking, I have reached it. I have found it... (for Mr. Ramsay) With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second...yes, she thought... I have had my vision (for Lily) (*To the Lighthouse* 169-70). This scene could be regarded as the image of wholeness which Virginia Woolf had been seeking to present, in which process she herself could gain a feeling of integrity even though only for a fleeting period.

In addition, I have discussed about this in one of my term paper of the course 'Virginia Woolf and British Modernism', that Woolf's way to get out of the shadow and gain rebirth also resembled the process of Lily finished her picture. From the very beginning of the novel, Lily sets out to create a painting of Mrs. Ramsay, which the last sketch is not finished until the end of the novel. The painting takes ten years and the process vividly reflects Lily's psychological growth and her mental development. Her working of painting is also about both understanding Mrs. Ramsay and examining herself, as well as an examining of herself for Woolf herself. In Part One, Lily only draws a "triangular purple shape" (*To the Lighthouse* 45), which strengthens her dim mood and conveys her confusion about the reality. Woolf depicted Lily's confusion and her ambivalent mental journey from multiple perspectives. In the course of protecting her independent personal space, she gradually cultivates the ability and skills that particular to observers to see things from an objective and neutral perspective. At that time, as long as she got disturbed by external emotions, Lily would switch her attention to artistic creation. Painting allows her to protect her dignity and identity.

Ten years quickly pass, in the part three of the novel, Lily picks up the brush again. In her remembrance of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily gradually figures out the strength of this lady, and truly realises that Mrs. Ramsay is actually a life artist. She shares her spiritual pursuit of the self-

realisation of female value. What Mrs. Ramsay pursues is just harmony and peace in ordinary life, a truth of real life, a goal that she has accomplished as early as 10 years ago. “With her great female character, she unites family members and friends together, and makes males and females to get along well in life. Therefore, Lily starts facing up to her emotional experience as a woman. During the contact with Mr. Ramsay this time, she finds his greatness: confident, brave and practical. Ten years’ experience and the current reality make her mature, her character also gradually completes, and eventually allows her to step over the territory that she had been firmly defended, allows her to harbour broader and more receptive mind to view all sorts of emotions brought by the colourful social life. As Mr. Ramsay visits the lighthouse together with his kids, Lily gets inspiration from the reminiscence of the dead, and finishes her painting suspended ten years ago” (Shuo 7).

Therefore, at the end of the novel, after finish the final line she draws, Lily is able to strike a balance among her spiritual demands, independent artistic creation and establishing a close tie with others. With the remembrance of Mrs. Ramsay, she also gradually grows up. In this novel, not only does Lily collect creative material from the life experience, but also gains a self-realisation during the course of understanding the real and the truth.

This is just like Woolf portraying herself. Her life is also spent in trauma and struggle. Woolf knows that she is half Mrs. Ramsay and half Lily. She lives in such an era that she has to follow some secular and solidified ways to live, at the same time, she also has the delicate tenderness and sentimentality inherited from her mother. However, she is not willing to be defeated by the era and reality and wants to live according to her true self. Therefore, she depicts an artist who has been pursuing the truth of her heart all her life to rebel with the reality.

Moreover, Woolf gives Lily (the only female figure with a vocation in the novel) a status of a painter to fight against the secular patriarchal society, which seems like throw an egg against a rock – to court one’s own ruin. (Painters didn’t possess a higher social status in fact). I predict one of the reasons is that her sister Vanessa has dreamed of becoming a painter since childhood. Kaplan claimed that “Central to this Freudian theory of trauma is a motivated unconscious. In this case, the traumatic event may trigger early traumatic happenings, already perhaps mingled with fantasy, and shape how the current event is

experienced” (Kaplan 32). Woolf uses the identity of her sister Vanessa’s ideal profession as well as her own language, makes up a memorial ceremony for women who have no chance to receive a formal education; at the same time, it is also a provocation and rebellion against the system of that era, for even under that historical and cultural context, the faith in an ideal freedom of these two girls have also been realised.

Perhaps the most impressive in *To the Lighthouse* is that Lily did what Woolf couldn’t get or couldn’t do in real life for her. Lily has found her true self, which might be what Woolf has been looking for. Although it can’t be said that Woolf didn’t find her true self to achieve inner peace in the end, after all, choosing to end her life is also a way to recognise herself and seek her desire for truth, but the completion of Lily’s painting and her relief at the end of the novel more directly highlight Woolf’s ideal truth – mental freedom. Perhaps unable to find the wholeness in the act of speech, damaged by the impact her traumatic experience, but in the silence of her creative figures, Woolf was united for a brief moment.

By writing, Virginia Woolf took bold attempts to embrace her past, to understand it and now and then to be enlightened by her moments of being. Some literary critics believes that conventions of truth-telling around autobiography can retrigger the trauma for the writer. But as far as I’m concerned, how to see the representation of trauma is really different from person to person. I’m not arguing all of what those critics think of. I just tend to believe that people are different, and although not all of us can be cured after suffering from trauma, we should also be optimistic about the ability of human beings to recover from trauma or adapt to accepting facing trauma, just as Woolf talked to herself, “I feel that by writing I’m doing what is far more necessary than anything else” (*Moments of Being* 73). Her memoirs put her face to face with her life which lingered in a matter-of-fact way; her fictions further deepened her knowledge of the truth of her life, nor without traces of that stinging history. As a result, her characters embodied both reality and fiction. They had Woolf’s minds, her vision and her trouble; nevertheless, they narrated their personal stories; or we may say, Woolf’s stories were re-told in a symbolic way. These characters were Virginia Woolf in fictional world, yet voicing out Woolf’s thoughts during heir own moments of being.

Through *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf seemed to depict a fuller picture of herself as well as her trauma truths from her innocent childhood to her adulthood when she suffered and struggled and then until her old years when she realised how to find herself, how to work with the disastrous impacts of her trauma and that she must face the past and went on. Moreover, we could find Virginia Woolf had been making efforts to recapture her past, to get to know her moments of being and to combine the past with the present so as to make it a whole – a true self.

## Conclusion

Laura Castor defines trauma as “what happens when a sudden event or many small events over time overwhelm the body’s system of care; one can no longer feel safe in one’s own body, mind, and in the environment” (Castor 2). Leigh Gilmore also mentioned that “indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as category” (Gilmore 6). In fact, Woolf did spend a long time that no longer feel safe since suffered many events and then turned to resort to her pen, the language, to maintain her representation.

Accordingly, my thesis is developed with an analysis of the writing of trauma in Virginia Woolf’s two novels – *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, finishing a preliminary and relatively complete study on the relation between Woolf’s writing and her own traumatic experiences. With the help of a systematic framework of theory of Freud, Caruth, LaCapra, Whitehead, Gilmore, Kaplan and so on, I get more sound evidence for confirming the influence of Woolf’s trauma on her literary writing. Then, by disclosing the trauma of female caused by the Great War from perspectives of three women in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and by War, Death, and Gender Injustice in *To the Lighthouse*, the thesis demonstrates Woolf’s strong criticism of war and patriarchy. Based on the understanding and analyses of the writing of trauma in the two novels, at the end of the thesis, I studied and explained how Woolf striped the life of both hers and her figures to some moments of being to tell her own trauma truth so as to get down to the truth of life.

According to Gilmore, “yet convictions about truth-telling, salutary as they are, can be inimical to the ways in which some writers bring trauma stories into languages” (Gilmore 3), that is, sometimes, the established conventions of autobiography constrain self-representations of trauma through reliance on the demonstrable truth. Gilmore thinks suffering from trauma is an unusual experience that may suppress the writer’s expressing desire or ability. Trauma is often buried in the unconsciousness, manifested by the subject’s being “perplexed and loath to talk” (Gilmore 3). So it is almost impossible for the autobiographer to completely truly tell his or her life, because people will never be able to reproduce the past had existed, but only recreate a kind of past we think of. Therefore,



Gilmore believes that trauma narrative is like fiction, is a process of creation and construction. I believe that's also why Woolf chose this kind of consciousness novels to convey her trauma truth and her real feeling and why she can finish the representation of trauma in her works both autobiographically and fictionally at the same time.

By analysing the writing of trauma in Woolf's two novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, this thesis comes to a conclusion that Woolf uses the construction of female characters which is based on her own experiences in the novels for a self-deconstruction and self-traumatic healing. If *Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf's initial attempt by writing to face the trauma, then *To the Lighthouse* is a kind of self-healing for her to face her traumatic life directly. At the ends of the two novels, both of the two protagonists Clarissa and Lily have got their relief and realised the truth or the meaning of life, which also represents Woolf's relief and her expectation of new life. Therefore, Woolf's writing of traumatic experiences whether personal or fictional plays a role in regulating her emotions, relieving or working through her trauma, just as what she realised, "It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together" (*Moments of Being* 72).

Woolf's pursuit of inner truth is reflected through artistic forms. She used the logical structure and textual organisation of art form to build an art world equal to real life. Therefore, although Woolf's life circle is relatively narrow, the theme of her novels is comparatively limited and individual, and her inspiration focuses on the living conditions and psychological awareness activities of people around her, especially women, her works still have profound social significance and unflinching charm.

As I summarised in the chapter three, Woolf is a writer who knows how to appreciate and pursue aesthetics and harmony in writing. Her narration of trauma is not limited to the description and presentation of traumatic events and traumatic memories. She constantly sublimates her memory of trauma into a stream of consciousness expression or beautiful human emotion presentation, which makes trauma writing more aesthetic and empathetic.

Therefore, if we take Woolf's trauma novels as a point, the position of this point on the historical coordinate axis of the development of English novels must be decisive, but it is not

fixed, instead, moving forward. The dawn of the twentieth century is based on the crisis of fundamentals in science, philosophy, art, as well as literature. It is this crisis from which modernism stems, and culminates in “a literature of trauma”, because its form reflects the traumatised psychology, and its content shows the despair and disorientation of trauma survivors. As a modernist writer in the early twentieth century, also a witness and survivor of this era, however, Woolf’s grasp of trauma writing and her ideological tentacles have been extended to future generations, even if she has her limitations in trauma writing creation. She believes that works created under the modernist novel experiment are works of a transitional period and a canyon between the two artistic peaks. And I hold that the writing of trauma in Virginia Woolf’s novels is one of the most important milestones in this canyon. As an experimental explorer who has contributed a lot in theory, creation and social significance, her contribution to the development of trauma literature between the twentieth century to nowadays is impressive and indelible.

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#### Visual Material:

Figure 1 – The Cover Page: *The Dancer*, by Colette Wilde Davis, 2012.

<https://no.pinterest.com/pin/247275835760681876/>.

Figure 2 – Virginia Woolf by Vanessa Bell, 1912.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw08084/Virginia-Woolf>.

