



The Ethics of Finitude and the Reconciliation of Eros and Thanatos Clarissa's Psychological Transition from Denial to Acceptance of her Instinctive Drives in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf has brought the contradictory concepts of life and death together in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). She has demonstrated 'joy' in Clarissa's party and 'pain' in Septimus's shattered life. These characters both challenge the meaning of life and death as well. While Septimus questions the authority of men like Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw through his suicide in order to be liberated, Clarissa attempts to deny the pain of her loneliness and senility through holding her party. The plots interfere each other as Lady Bradshaw talks about Septimus's death in the middle of Clarissa's party. This event helps Clarissa to balance her inner instincts – Eros and Thanatos. Clarissa considers Septimus's death as an aesthetical beautiful reaction and a way of communication, liberation and salvation. By the concept of finitude, not only she learns to fear no more the difficulties in life as there is no pain is everlasting so, but also she understands she has to seize the day and enjoy because life is short and human beings only live for once. Therefore, as she goes back to her party with balance between her life and death instincts, she denies no more her pains but accepts them and in the meanwhile tries to enjoy practically everything in life. Therefore, at the end of the novel, she feels safe and released. In the other words, through considering Septimus's death, she feels catharsis.

Key words: Eros, Thanatos, joy, pain, Catharsis.

1. INTRODUCTION

"I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual."

Virginia Woolf, *Dairy*, February 17, 1922

World War I (1914-1918), famous as The Great War, was the first macabre war that people experienced to that date for the advanced deadly weapons, the large number of involved countries, and the countless victims it left. Too many were killed and left alone their bereaved families and the rest either became disabled or suffered from psychological problems such as shell shock. Because of The First World War's bitterness and the changes it brought in economy, industry, society and culture, people's beliefs changed and many great figures as well as war writers rose up and shaped new ideologies which deconstructed the pervious norms. Pacifists such as Freud and Einstein also discussed about the origin of the war as well.

In 1932, in a letter Sigmund Freud wrote to Einstein: "human instincts are of two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite - which we call 'erotic' ... or 'sexual', with a deliberate extension of the popular conception of 'sexuality' - and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive and destructive instinct" (4798). Therefore, the life instinct (Eros) – all surviving creative life-producing drives, is interwoven with any kinds of pleasures; while death instinct (Thanatos) – the aggressive destructive forces, is dealt with pain. Similar to Darwin's principles of the survival of the fittest, Freud also concludes: "The living being, that is to say, defends its own existence by destroying foreign bodies" (4800). Therefore, the existence and operation of Eros and Thanatos in human psyche can be one of the main war origins. Further, it should be notified that the operation of these two instincts is blended and none of them can be activated in the absence of the other. In fact, they are opposing poles but they cannot be hostile. Yet, a healthful psyche is the one in which the drives are perfectly reconciled.

The purpose of this study is to bring the so told ideas of Eros and Thanatos and how they are reconciled in the psyche of the heroine of Virginia Woolf's great work – *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). In fact, Woolf who herself had