

Critical Essay of a Secondary Source

Virginia Woolf is a renowned English novelist and essayist in the twentieth century. Woolf is highly respected as one of the modern literary figures who created works that has transcended time and space. Some literary experts described her works such as Mrs. Dollaway, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* provided a new light to the English language by being more descriptive and compassionate. Woolf defied the realist trend of writing during this time. She relatively used a new literary genre of expressing her beliefs and perceptions in a unique manner. In almost all of her narration, she exemplified an impressive style of exploring central characters in a thoroughly descriptive manner.

She wrote genuinely on intra and interpersonal struggles human beings undergo. Issues of life, death, family, art, thought, and immorality are just some themes she utilized to give readers an opportunity to get to know her and her uncanny personality. Her works congregated both critics and devotees. Some perceived her works are great contribution in modern literature. Her extreme use of stream of consciousness provided a new taste of reading to the public. Woolf's illustration of characters in a lyrical manner made her one of the champions of Modernist writing in writing. However, to conservatives, her works are primarily delusional and are too emotionally driven that the theme of her work are sometimes disregarded.

Her death furthermore created a lot of controversies on the main premise of writing. Her suicide divided the public on her sanity placing her work in scrutiny. Films, books and articles were publicized to analyze the life and works of Woolf.

One of which is a book entitled, *Granite and Rainbow: The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf* by Mitchell Leaska published in 1988. Compared to other authors who previously made a biography of Woolf, Leaska revealed facts on her life. As a professor at the New York University, he reiterated the life of Woolf through his brilliance in humanities.

Leaska's fundamental framework in his version of Woolf's biography is medical (and or psychological) one. He immediately embraced Woolf's psychological disorder of being afflicted with manic- depression. He perceived such disorder is not to be associated with neurosis but it is a condition genetically transmitted. Though his examination of Woolf's coupled with the past accounts of other authors, he concluded that Virginia Woolf's peculiar stance was a result of her family background.

In his book, he argued, "Does this genetically transmitted disorder account for--indeed, 'explain'--Virginia Woolf's extraordinary powers as a novelist and essayist?" He immediately provided a justification on such concern. His medical (and psychological) expertise provided a new outlook on the influence of Woolf's admirable writing. Is it entirely because of manic depression that such lyrical and poignant writing occurred? Is it pure talent? Leaska supposed that Woolf, just like any other human being is triggered by past events in his / her lives that might caused her illness.

Virginia Woolf had a traumatic and harrowing life. According to Leaska, the deaths of her loved ones at a young age, sexual molestation by her half brothers and her sister's early marriage are some realities she underwent that triggered her illness. Her mental instability due to her experiences caused such literary virtuosity. Leaska described the writing of Woolf as "twisted pleasure from pain" works. In this manner, Woolf uses her works as defense mechanism to her manic depressive cycle. This is evident to the considered last note she wrote for her husband:

" I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier 'til this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that — everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been".

Through Leaska's account of Woolf's life, showed how she connected her inner and outer world. Her creation of fictional works was a satisfying task. It provided an escape for her in her battle of manic depression and horrific family experience. Leaska further provided affirmative support on Woolf's illness. He considered her disorder as a fuel that has ignited Woolf's productivity in writing. It is through her manic depression Woolf was able to help her observe her world intensely.

The sexual and emotional incidents during Woolf's life such as sexual molestation by her half brother and the abyss between her and her family served as catalyst of her creative process. Leaska included crucial characters in his book that made it different from the previous biography that was written.

Leaska examined the personalities of Woolf's immediate family that caused her disorder. Her father, Leslie Stephen, an emotionally difficult patriarch and his relationship with her passive mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen were the variables that caused Virginia's unbalanced which molded her literary career and marriage. The combination of aloofness from her mother and dependency of his father made her unconscious to be superior with her sanity having distinct perception on her relationships. She somewhat had blurry distinction of what is reality and fictional. Her writings were seen as bridges that close the gap Woolf created.

The book of Leaska is indeed a good book to read if one wants to understand the psychological roots of Virginia Woolf in relation to her works. Although the details of her birth, life, accomplishments, and death remain the same, Leaska was the first author who used his knowledge on humanities and psychology to give praise to Woolf's works. Moreover, unlike other authors who have narrated Woolf's life, it is only Leaska who celebrated the disorder of Woolf. He did not take such illness against Woolf in his analysis of her life.

The psychological stance of Woolf might have provided biases to authors as well as readers of her biography. Certainly, one's psychological mindset is a serious matter, but one cannot prevent prejudices and own interpretation on the literary "gift" of Virginia Woolf. It is therefore relevant to readers to explore the narration made by Leaka. Woolf's personal challenges and conflicts were used primarily as basis. This approach made Woolf to be publicly understood one way or the other.

Reference:

Leaska, Mitchell. 1998. *The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf*. New York: Farrar, Straus and
Grioux