

Insights about Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway's Character

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf is famous for deeply studying the minds of her characters. She uses the flow of responsiveness to capture the flickering, fleeting, and evading nature of human consciousness. Mrs. Dalloway is no different regarding her treatment of her characters and the way they see the world and their connection with other human beings. Primarily, the novel focuses on a very complicated triangular relationship between Clarissa, Richard, and Peter. Richard Dalloway is the stereotypical white male living in London, having a stable job with a beautiful wife and children. Furthermore, he is the dominating husband as he makes all the decisions, and it is evident when Clarissa had no intent of inviting Ellie Henderson to the party, but 'she would do it of course, as he wished it' (Dalloway 117). On the contrary, Peter Walsh is single and in search of a wife, unable to sustain his life as he does not have even a consistent job; in other words, he is an unproductive and cautious man, yet he considers himself "utterly free" (Dalloway, 52). Great happiness in Peter's and Richard's lives comes from the memory of being loved by Clarissa; however, they have the wrong ways of expressing their feelings to Clarissa, which leads the three parties to misjudge one another's feelings. This inability to show their true feelings towards each other reflects the unique insights of their worldview and the way they see each other and the people around them.

Discussion

To get insights about Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway's characters, first, we need to understand their relationship with Clarissa Dalloway; only then can we truly understand their position regarding their love for Clarissa. Clarissa regrets her decision to marry Richard; this regret develops her character as she starts to see herself stuck in an 'attic room' and feeling 'an emptiness about the heart of life' (Dalloway, 30). The whole idea is centred around and against the conventional mindset of the women of that time, as well as of our time. The point is not to convince the reader that Clarissa and Peter can make a good pair, but the purpose of this is to point out the complexity between their characters. Peter was always too hard on Clarissa due to his 'absurd demands' and 'impossible things' (Dalloway, 62). Furthermore, she also confesses the worst possibility of being with Peter as she says, "with Peter, everything had to be shared; everything went into. And it was intolerable" (Dalloway, 7). On the other hand, Clarissa and Richard, Richard loves her, but he is unable to express this feeling of love as he walks all the way from London to tell Clarissa that he loves her in so many ways, and Woolf gives us a reason not so strong, she states that maybe he's lazy or maybe he is shy. They have been

married for years, but he does not know anything about her, yet he thinks that his life has been a miracle because he married Clarissa, but the end of these lines reinforces the fact of Richard's self-being, as it was about his own life that he mentions. Clarissa believes that all sort of relationships shares a gulf concerning men and women, but even then, one must respect one's isolation and independence. These remarks suggest the dominating force of Richard Walsh. In the sequence where he enters with flowers, Clarissa reacts: "She had failed him, once at Constantinople; and Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her" (Dalloway, 115).

Coming towards the primary focus of this essay, Richard Dalloway and Peter Walsh are the polar opposites in some instances of the novel; for example, as mentioned earlier in the introduction, Peter Walsh is a romantic fellow; he follows dreams, unlike Richard, as we see him following a girl in the street, we also see Richard following people but their ways are different as in case of Peter the quest is playful while on the other hand for Richard it is a tight chase. In other words, he is not as romantic and adventurous as Peter; he does not know what to buy for his wife. He does not spur to purchase jewelry for Clarissa. Instead, he chooses to buy flowers for her and, back in a few pages, we see a man offering flowers to a lady hostess. Here, Richard would buy flowers for his hostess; the sense of irony is evident because we can sense a distance or coldness between the husband and wife, and the impossibility of filling that gap. Hence, a cycle of difficulties can be graphed as Richard is reticent to love Clarissa or at least confess his love, and Clarissa is reluctant to marry/love Peter Walsh. Furthermore, he is nostalgic about Norfolk for marrying Clarissa, and this comes to us through a very accurate remark made by Peter Walsh about Richard, as Peter can 'see through' people, a very uncanny knack of his character. There is a force unconsciously driving him away from Clarissa, and this situation is very well handled by Virginia Woolf when she describes Richard's action of carrying his flowers as a weapon. It is the weapon of saying 'I love you' to his wife. On the contrary, Peter is the primal man, the adventurous soul, the man who had abandoned civilization and started living in India, a colony of the British Empire. He loves Clarissa, but being the epitome of culture, Clarissa is afraid to realize the sense of attraction she feels for Peter Walsh. She values her soul too much to give it away to Peter; she is scared of surrendering her soul to Peter or anyone else. She is shy to accept life in its all raw sensuality like Peter; instead, she would accept it in her civilized manners by marrying Richard and living a life of middle-class standards, unlike Peter Walsh. That is the reason she married Richard, and the gap in communication that we have already discussed highlights the different natures of both male characters. Mrs. Dalloway sees the human existence regarding art and poetry; she enjoys the delicate richness of the flowers and their pleasant odor, but unlike Peter, she is unable to see another side of life in all its poignancy. Furthermore, there is a strong sense of resistance that she follows as she is faced with Peter Walsh; for instance, when Peter breaks in, she hides herself to save her virginity.

Conclusion

If we are to look at the commonalities between Richard Dalloway and Peter Walsh, this commonality resides in the fact of unfulfillment and the failure of relationships, particularly the failure of love. The

novel is a perspective that does not shy away from seeing the drama of human emotions but gives us its realistic depiction of characters, their chase for love, and the failure to acknowledge the painful existence they are thrown in, allegedly, as the narrator says:

“...But—but—why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy?” (Mrs. Dalloway 117-18). Unhappiness is one of the central themes of this novel that binds all characters, specifically Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Clarissa Dalloway together.

(Prose, 2025) (The New Yorker, 2021) (British Library, 2022) (Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain, 2025)

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