

Natalia Alves Niel

Professor Ashley Foster

English 31 (06) - Readings in British Literature

01 December 2023

The Representations of Mourning and Grief in Virginia Woolf's "A Haunted House" and other  
texts

In the short story "A Haunted House" by Virginia Woolf, the modernist writer once again brings forth a mysterious narrative which at first introduces the piece as one related to the supernatural, considering the appearance of "ghosts" (In O'Hara 2003, the author exposes the new non-religious format in the texts, which introduced ghosts and other supernatural entities to break out of the old standard) as the main characters. As the story progresses, it is possible to understand that there are no real ghosts. The ghosts are a metaphor for the memories a widower has of the wife he left behind once, and when he comes back home she is already gone (Deceased). As he roams around their old house, he recalls fragments of their life together and ultimately concludes that their love was their biggest treasure as his mind is invaded by endearing memories of his beloved and the house.

As the widower goes from one room to the next, the flashes of the life he once shared with his wife are brought forward in a stream of consciousness, characterized by the natural flow of ideas that describe the world around the narrator according to his own perceptions:

*“a turning away from teleological ways of thinking about time to a sense of time as discontinuous, overlapping, non-chronological in the way we experience it; a shift from linear time to "moment time," and from "progress" to "flux" (Keane, No Date).*

Woolf's life also plays some part on how she describes grief in her pieces, considering a description of her own father dealing with the grief of losing his wife, Virginia's mother, in his Victorian traditional style, which she didn't seem to accept or understand ( *"For a long time he abandoned himself to grief; his life, like his writing paper, was confined within a deep black border."* Smith 1995, page 311). Somewhat similar to the man who lost his wife in "A Haunted House", who tried to find comfort in the memories of them as a happy couple, before being drawn to the darkness that comes with coming into terms that his beloved is gone. This last argument leaves a space for Westons interpretation of the difficult situation of accepting the loss of a loved one in depth.

Many ideas were brought forth to connect Woolf's personal life, the Modernist Movement in literature and writers' perspective on Virginia's works, all aligned according to the fact that grief, regret and mourning are elementary aspects of the topics discussed previously. This brings the reader to the conclusion that "The Haunted House" revolves around a widower coming to terms with his loss by recognizing the value of their "treasure" (The love and all moments shared between the couple).

## Works cited

Keane, Melba Cuddy . “*Modernism, some characteristics:*” The University of Toronto at Scarborough. (No date)

<https://www.utoronto.ca/~mcuddy/ENGB02Y/Modernism.html>

O’Hara, Daniel T. “*Modernism’s Ghosts*” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 26, no. 3/4, 2003, pp. 154–58. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30053239?socuid=f449485f-f483-4d45-9de1-1a2d927afdb4>

Smith, Susan Bennett. “Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Representations of Mourning in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*”. *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.4 (1995): 310 - 327. Web

[https://csu-fresnostate.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL\\$ \\_UFR/3koikd/cdi\\_proquest\\_journals\\_221555429](https://csu-fresnostate.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL$ _UFR/3koikd/cdi_proquest_journals_221555429)

Weston, Elizabeth A. “Narrating Grief in Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* and John Banville’s *The Sea*.” *PsyArt*, Jan. 2010, p. 10. *EBSCOhost*,

[https://csu-fresnostate.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL\\$ \\_UFR/3koikd/cdi\\_proquest\\_journals\\_894123411](https://csu-fresnostate.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL$ _UFR/3koikd/cdi_proquest_journals_894123411)