

The Duchess and the Jeweller

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Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Virginia Woolf occupies a place of significance in 20th century fiction for her contribution as a writer of 'stream of consciousness' technique. 'To the Lighthouse', 'The Waves', 'The Waves' are some of the famous works of Mrs Woolf. Virginia Woolf in her novels and stories adopted the ^{method of} psychological analysis for telling the story and drawing a character. She laid emphasis not on incidents and straightforward narration, but on the presentation of character by exposing subconscious and unconscious regions of mind.

The story 'The Duchess and the Jeweller' is a typical piece based on the stream of consciousness technique. The author ~~ess~~ picks up one event in the life of Oliver, the leading character ~~of~~ the story, and reflects the inner feelings of his heart. Oliver recalls his past life with ~~present~~ always intruding, and we come to know not only his ~~external~~ external condition but also the inner recesses of ^{his} mind.

Oliver Bacon is an experienced and reputed jeweller. He lives at the top of a house overlooking the Green Park. He is a grey haired, stout and fanatical person. He began his life in a filthy little alley and in his childhood he used to sell stolen dogs to fashionable women in White Chapel. He, by dint of his hard work and genius, later became one of the richest jewellers in England. His jewellery shop in London had become known throughout Europe and America. He enjoys all the comforts of life. He owns

... a car and has a villa at Richmond, overlooking the river, with trellises of red roses. He commands a train of attendants who are ^{ever} ready to offer services at his beck and call.

But all these worldly achievements were not enough ^{to end} for the psychological conflicts he is haunted with. He was "still a sad man, a dissatisfied man, a man who seeks something that is hidden though he had won his bet". Oliver in his personal habits and mode of living appears to be a cynical and whimsical man. His fascination to the ladies of higher origins like "duchesses, Countesses, Viscountesses and Honourable Ladies" reflects conflict between the past and the present associated with his psyche. In the present, externally he has all the ~~traits~~ ^{visibly} visible traits to class himself with the rich and the high of the society, but internally he is unable to free himself from the past memories when he used to sell ^{the} stolen dogs for his subsistence. The portrait of his mother which he keeps at a place of pride in his house signifies both his past and present. His mother used to chide him for his mischiefs in childhood 'Oh, Oliver! When will you have sense, my son?' He now wishes to remind to his dead mother "I have kept my word,". His strong bond to the portrait of his mother is reflective of his inseparably linked past and present. There is a lady, the Duchess

of Lambourne, to whom he is greatly attracted. She is healthy, beautiful and possesses charming personality. She is a clever lady and for her financial gains ^{she} exploits the psychological weakness of Oliver. She has been a frequent visitor of Oliver's house for the sake of ~~the~~ getting financial help from him. On one occasion she comes to visit Oliver to sell ten ~~pearls~~ pearls for twenty thousand pounds. The lady asks for the ^{pleasure} and dupes him even by offering him the ^{pleasure} association with his daughters, particularly Diana, the most beautiful of them. The psychological conflict of Oliver makes him misjudge the situation. He was aware of the character of the lady as he ^{well} knew that "They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress, each cheated the other, each needed the other, ". Oliver is not given chance to test the authenticity of the pearls and ^{he} signs the cheque of ^{the} required amount. The lady departs with the cheque and Oliver ^{later} discovers that ~~that~~ the pearls are fake.

Again it is the portrait of his mother to which he confesses "Forgive me, Oh, my mother!" Again he feels to be a little boy in the alley selling stolen dogs.

Through out the story the narrative is seldom conventional. The text of the story runs like the ^{flowing} movement of the psychological stream of the main character. The present and the past are mixed and they ~~are~~ ^{are} made make simultaneous

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progression with the help of flashbacks. The story presents a typical example of stream of consciousness technique, so brilliantly used by Mrs Woolf in his writings.
