
How Literary Style Of Virginia Woolf Is Connected To Her Mental Health

Creativity Linked with Mental Illness: Virginia Woolf

Abstract

Virginia Woolf was an English writer who was considered one of the best writers in the 20th century. She was believed to have Bipolar II disorder and there is more than enough evidence to back this statement up. Modern psychologists think this because of the mood swings within her writings depicted in certain characters in her books. She was born in London and grew up in an educated, British family who taught her how to read and write and this made her writing career take off. Her mother died when she was at a young age and this is what some people believed was to start her breakdowns and her mood swings and periods of depression.

Background of Creative Figure

Virginia Woolf was born in Kensington, London and her name at birth was Adeline Virginia Stephen. Her parents were Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen and Sir Leslie Stephen. Woolf was taught by her parents, who knew how to read and write and also her household contained three marriages. Virginia's father was an editor, critic, biographer, and also had a connection to William Thackeray, a famous British novelist, meaning that Virginia and her siblings were raised in an environment filled with influences from the Victorian literary society.

Virginia's mother died when she was 13, in 1895, and it led to her first of many nervous breakdowns. In 1904, her father's death led to her collapse and she was temporarily placed in an institution. She and her sister were also sexually abused by their step-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth and modern scholars think that her depression and breakdowns may have been results of this. Throughout her whole life, Virginia went through mood swings and had to spend a lot of time in a private nursing home helping women with disorders. Later, she then drowned herself and some believe she did this because of her bipolar disorder may have caused her to go into a temporary state of depression.

Symptoms of Abnormal Behavior

Virginia Woolf was believed to be diagnosed with the mental illness, Bipolar II also known as hyper manic depression. Symptoms of bipolar II are large depressive episodes, lasting up to two weeks, mood swings, and also at least one hypomanic episode. People usually mistake Bipolar II for depression because of the similar symptoms. Hypomanic episodes change your personality so extremely that even people around you would know something is wrong. Virginia showed in her writings how some characters would have periods of depression but other periods of euphoria in certain books.

Specific Diagnoses From Two Different Sources

Katherine Dalsimer, Ph.D., explains how Virginia Woolf was said to have bipolar disorder from the age of 13, when her mother suddenly died. She says how Virginia's writings have both excitement and dark moods within them. John McManamy also says how Virginia had constant mood swings and she slept into a state of deep depression at times. She had experienced many breakdowns at this point, starting from when her mother died at age 13, in 1895. Some say that her illness led her to put stones in her pocket and drown herself in a river.

Ways in Which Their Illness Informed Their Art

Virginia Woolf's illness manifested itself into her writings in many ways within many characters. Most of her characters in her stories were just versions of herself and so these characters either showed euphoric personalities or depressed moods depending on her bipolar disorder and her mood swings. An example of this is her character, Septimus Smith from the book *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, of course, and he shows many mood swings between euphoric states and depressed states throughout the book.

Analyze one of Their Works and Connect it to Mental Illness

Like stated in the previous paragraph, Virginia Woolf shows her bipolar disorder within the character Septimus Smith in the book, *Mrs. Dalloway*, by depicting mood swings within this character. Another character in this book is Clarissa Dalloway, who also shows these mood swings and also shows episodes throughout the book, both being symptoms of bipolar II disorder. Lastly, Woolf depicts Clarissa in these euthymic states as a mixture of herself in these certain moods when she isn't depressed. Clarissa also is mostly not depressed, based upon what Woolf's mood is at the time.

Evidence Connecting Creativity and Mental Illness

This day in age, the advances in science have allowed us to explore the great thinkers and writers of the past and allow us to understand them. Most of the big "thinkers" and artists of the past, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Edgar Allan Poe, and Virginia Woolf, actually had a mental illness of some sort. These ailments, however, allowed these creative people to create some of the greatest works of art and writings that the world have ever seen and some think that it was these illnesses that allowed these people to achieve such feats. Dr. Arnold Ludwig, a psychiatry professor at the University of Kentucky, conducted an experiment where he examined 1004 "eminent" figures throughout history. He determined that most of those people were diagnosed with a mental illness. This shows that most of the creative thinkers in history had a mental illness.

Next, J. Philippe Rushton conducted a study where he found that he found that creativity has a direct correlation with intelligence and psychoticism, which measures vulnerability to mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia.

Evidence Arguing Against the Connection

Creative historical figures with mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia or bipolar, are overrepresented, meaning that their mental illness really doesn't help them, rather it hurts them. First off, people in Sweden in creative occupations and mental illnesses, were observed

and studies show that they are more subjected to suicide and substance abuse than people in the same profession without a mental illness. This shows that their mental illness really just hurts the person and it leads them to do stupid things but they cannot do anything to fight it.

Secondly, other studies show how when a creative person is mentally ill, the creative production must be carried out during periods of low symptom activity, meaning that when there are not many symptoms of the illness at the moment, is when the creativity can be carried out. This, in fact, is more of an ailment than something helping people because it limits these people to when they can produce art.

My Thoughts on Creativity and Mental Illness

Honestly, I do indeed think that when an artist has a mental illness, they will create more interesting and groundbreaking art because of how they think differently than a “normal” person and how they carry out actions differently. Let’s take Virginia Woolf, for example.

Virginia Woolf was said to have bipolar, where the diagnosed goes through constant mood swings and breakdowns. I think that if she didn’t have this illness, she wouldn’t be such a recognized figure because her art would have been average and would not have stood out without thinking how she did. Her characters showed symptoms of bipolar, as did she, and readers were drawn to this new way of writing in the 20th century.