

THE REPRESENTATION OF ANOMIC CHARACTERS IN THE POST-WORLD
WAR I: T. S. ELIOT'S "PRUFROCK" AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS.*
*DALLOWAY***

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to define that the individuals who lived in disastrous war years or other global changes could be explained within a new term of the 1890s, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim's "anomie" definition, because of experiencing some sociopsychological cases such as alienation, isolation, estrangement, anxiety and disappointment. As the theme of war began to inhabit an increasing number of modernist novels in English literature, most major characters were defined as anomic since they were featured with psychological trauma and alienation from society that stemmed directly from wartime experiences. T. S. Eliot had prophecies about this disenchantment in his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in which J. A. Prufrock is incapable of overcoming hopelessness and lovelessness in the 1914s. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is also an example of this type of novel concerning a key subplot of a young veteran Septimus Warren Smith who experiences insanity and suicide. Being in such a state of mind results from the sociopsychological existence that ends up the emergence of different types of good and evil in society. Social, physical and moral horrors of disappointment, cynicism, bleak and heartbreak that inevitably result in insanity and suicide. This novel emphasizes human feelings and relationships of collective life in the era between the two world wars and also signifies the mood of war times in respect to both the human personality and the historical situation in a broken world of broken sensibilities. The men and women in *Mrs. Dalloway* are physically and emotionally wounded casualties of their time because of being badly paralyzed by the power of war malaise that leads to desperation and deprivation. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith is like Prufrock because of being in an anomic situation which results in desperation and disenchantment. J. Alfred Prufrock and Septimus Warren Smith suffer from the madness of the Great War and manifest the ideology and the representation of the emergence of evil within the war era.

Key Words: Anomie, Emile Durkheim, T. S. Eliot, "Prufrock", Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

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ÖZET

I. Dünya Savaşı Sonrasında Anomik Karakterlerin Temsili: T. S. Eliot'un "Prufrock" Adlı Şiiri ve Virginia Woolf'un *Mrs. Dalloway* Adlı Romanı

Bu çalışmanın amacı, savaş dönemlerinde ve diğer küresel değişimlerde bireylerin yalnızlaşma, yabancılaşma, toplumdaki uzaklaşma, endişelenme ve şaşkınlık gibi sosyopsikolojik durumlara maruz kaldıklarından dolayı Fransız sosyolog Emile Durkheim'in 1890'larda ortaya attığı "anomi" tanımını altında incelenmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. İngiliz Edebiyatında savaş teması modern romanlarına konu olmasıyla birlikte, savaş yıllarında yaşamış birçok karakter savaş travması ve toplumdaki uzaklaşarak yalnızlığa düşme gibi birçok psikolojik problemle karşı karşıya kaldıklarından "anomik" karakterler şeklinde tanımlanabilirler. 1900'lü yıllarda, T. S. Eliot J. Alfred Prufrock'u ümitsizlik ve sevgisizliğin üstesinden gelemediği için, "J. Alfred Prufrock'un Aşk Şarkısı" adlı şiirinde bu problemlerle karşı karşıyadır diye tanımlar. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* adlı romanlara cereyan eden alt bir konu olan Septimus Warren Smith'i aynı problemleri yaşayan bir kişi olarak gösterir ve içinde bulunduğu delilik diye görülen psikolojik gerilimlerin sonucunu intiharla sonuçlanan bir durumla açıklar. Bu sosyopsikolojik durum toplumdaki iyi ve kötünün aynı anda aynı yerde var oluşundan ortaya çıkmıştır. Sosyal, fiziksel ve ahlaki korkular şaşkınlığa, kasvetli oluşa, üzüntüye sebep olduğundan delilik ve intihar gibi durumlarında beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu roman, iki savaş arasındaki tarihsel yapıda kırık duyguların yaşandığını toplumsal sistemde inceler. *Mrs. Dalloway*'de, savaş sonucunda çöküntüye uğrayan ve ümitsizliğe kapılarak fiziksel ve duygusal yönden yaralanan kadın ve erkekler vardır. Septimus Warren Smith, şaşkınlık, ümitsizlik, yalnızlaşma ve yabancılaşma gibi sosyopsikolojik problemler yaşadığı için Prufrock'a benzemektedir. Dolayısıyla, J. Alfred Prufrock ve Septimus Warren Smith savaş dönemindeki kötünün varoluşundan dolayı acı çekerler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anomi, Emile Durkheim, T. S. Eliot, "Prufrock", Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

This article manifests the connection between sociology and literary texts in respect to social and global changes such as the wars which influence the psychological orientation in the course of history. While pursuing a sociopsychological study, this article pursues a comparative literary basis by focusing on Thomas Stearns Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Throughout literary texts, the aim is to pinpoint the validity of sociopsychological concerns in different phases of history. As "anomic" studies have become widespread in the global changes, the dawn of the twentieth century would be a good beginning for a sociopsychological perspective. The protagonists of these comparative works will be analyzed in

accordance with Emile Durkheim's sociological study of "anomie." Within the analysis of anomic psychologies, this study will also underline whether there exists an ideological basis within the rapid political and social changes in Virginia Woolf's novel and T.S. Eliot's poem.

Both T. S. Eliot, an American poet and Virginia Woolf, an English writer observe sociopsychological case of the individuals in their literary texts. Although they are from different origins, they both manifest the desperate quest of spiritual disorder and depravity as a result of the causality of the war chaos, i.e. they underline a universal matter of the psychological consequences of the terror in life. Prufrock is the voice of the poet and also becomes the symbol of most characters' fragmented thoughts and feelings as expressed via the inner monologues of Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The goal of sociology, according to Emile Durkheim, is to develop the social laws that allow the emergence of a morally unique industrial social order and, thus, sociology considers the moral phenomena in terms of industrial and social developments (Ashley, 1998: 114). A "collective consciousness" sharing beliefs, values and norms, in Durkheim's terms, emerges in the interrelationships and the interaction of individuals (118). Durkheim referred to the emergence of disorganization where social norms, rules and values exist in modern societies of weakened states in the case of anomic states. For him, in order to have a meaningful social reform, social norms and normative guidelines are significant.

In the course of social changes, "anomie" is a term coined by Emile Durkheim in his pioneering study, *Suicide* (1897), combining theoretical and statistical analysis of the major types of suicide. Thus, anomic suicide, according to Durkheim, results from the breakdown of the social standards necessary for the regulation of behaviours (Ashley, 1998: 121). Durkheim explains anomie in terms of a state of "normlessness." This indicates that anomie can impair out the ability to establish self-conscious human control in social life. Any account of alienation stands for the existence of anomic contribution (Thom, 1984: 80). Anomie exists when individuals feel to be confused in their actions and become ambiguous in the social condition and psychic states. This orientation results in the rise of suicide rates as a response to the state of meaninglessness (Powell, 1988: 8). This implies that the feelings of emptiness as a mental disorder cause the emergence of anomic states in social circumstances. Thus, there is a strong linkage of anomie with mental disorder in the functioning of social order which has extensively been afterwards explained by Robert Merton in his anomie model of deviant behaviors¹ (Dunham, 1964: 128-129).

¹ Robert Merton, a distinguished American sociologist, has famous articles in sociology that link anomie with deviance in respect to the discontinuity between cultural goals. As Merton states in his theory of deviance, deviant behavior manifests the relationship between cultural structure and anomie. His paradigm of the deviant behavior is about

To Durkheim, anomie occurs when the disruption of social order allows man's aspirations to go beyond the accepted ethical and governmental social rules. (Clinard, 1964: 7). This indicates that Durkheim demonstrates the problems facing modern societies. According to Durkheim when a social system is in a state of anomie, common values and common meanings become unacceptable, because individuals are characterized by a sense of futility, lack of purpose, and emotional emptiness and despair in all sorts of conflicts. This indicates that anomie is a state of mind of a person who has no standards or sense of continuity or obligation in social bonds.

Wars have been a thematic basis for psychological traumas, obsessions, and the sense of anxiety, isolation and alienation. As the theme of war began to inhabit an increasing number of modernist literary studies, most major characters became anomic since they were featured with psychological trauma and alienation that stem from wartime experiences. T.S. Eliot's well-known poem "Prufrock" and Virginia Woolf's noteworthy novel *Mrs. Dalloway* can be considered the samples of literary texts that manifest sociological, physical and psychological horrors of disappointment, cynicism, bleakness and heartbreak causing insanity and suicide. *Mrs. Dalloway* can roughly be analyzed in terms of stylistic, feminist, and sociopsychological perspectives. In addition to war trauma, it also happens to be an attack on patriarchy and imperialism (Allan, 1995: 29). However, this article will focus on a sociopsychological perspective and will not deal with a feminist concern. Thus, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, set in 1923 in between the two world wars, is considered in sociopsychological critical concerns. In this novel, a young veteran Septimus Warren Smith experiences insanity and suicide at the end. There should be the reasons for his suicide in social and psychological concerns. Virginia Woolf reflects British society of the 1920s from different aspects through the events of the passing hours of one day and emphasizes human feelings and relationships in that period. The men and women in *Mrs. Dalloway* are physically and emotionally wounded casualties of the post-war era that lead to desperation and deprivation. This case brings forth the necessity for the analysis of the Prufrock character in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" once again and consider Septimus Warren Smith and Mrs. Dalloway Prufrock-like characters.

T.S. Eliot manifests a fragmented human psyche in J. Alfred Prufrock in his poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1911) and offers a critical and pessimistic vision of the modern period of the 1910s. Eliot depicts a moral and spiritual journey via the narrator and the protagonist, Prufrock. In his poem, Eliot explores the moral and social corruption of the modern condition. Prufrock is manifested as an individual experiencing a state of loneliness and alienation due to possessing the absence of passion as well as personal inadequacy to define his dramatic inner self. The poem reflects the enactment of thematic and psychic complexity of the concurrent conflicts while playing the role of being a satire on London society. Prufrock who isolates

the modes of adaptation of conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion in society. When there is a discontinuity between culture and structure, then there happens to be a dysfunctional consequence of deviant behaviors (Clinard, 1964: 16).

himself from his environment is the product of the society that he lives in (Jain 1991: 33-34). Eliot defines Prufrock's isolation in which he lost all his courage in life:

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare" and, "Do I dare"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin
.....
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse (Eliot, 1980: 1343)

Here Prufrock defines the fragmented self of uncertainty, anxiety, alienation and isolation. He has his anomic state of estrangement from social life when he expresses his inner monologue in which he defines himself as the one who is ready to disturb the universe. Eliot uses interior monologues to invite the reader close to the self and thus considers the state of meaninglessness that results in the anomic case of alienation, isolation and estrangement of the self. Eliot emphasizes this state of anxiety throughout reflecting Prufrock as a man who defines himself not to be "Prince Hamlet but that of the ridiculous Fool" who is in a state of insanity (Eliot, 1980: 1345). The emphasis is on the sense of insignificance and nothingness.

Beginning with the statement "Let us go then, you and I," T. S. Eliot reflects the quality of fragmentation in the mind of the protagonist in the "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Within a call for the need to end the restlessness of Prufrock who echoes his consciousness, i.e., the poem is about Prufrock's interior monologue under the title of a love song addressed to the self in which he depicts his shame and anxiety (Scofield 1998: 58). If the "you," Eliot addresses is Prufrock himself, then the reader is being trapped by the consciousness of Prufrock in the poem. That is, the reader encounters a fragmented mind in which Prufrock addresses himself because of having two divided mental states in a unique mind, i.e. there happens to be a division of mind or splitted self (Jain 1991: 40). This signifies that the poem is an interior monologue that questions the notion of the self as a unified entity in a corrupted world of emotions. Such a division of mind also signifies an image of escape in the poem. Prufrock leaves behind the complexity of his inner world while addressing a second "you" personality in his inner world. Are "you" and "I" that Prufrock expresses in the poem alike or merely in similar situations? Whereas "I" Prufrock explains is subjective, the "you" that he addresses is objective (Williamson, 1968: 58-59). Although such a notion of the existence of objectivity and subjectivity refers to inactivity and release from his fragmented world of the divided mind, in fact, it also manifests the complexity in Prufrock's inner world. While describing himself, Prufrock underlines his social life. He demonstrates a modern psychological context which derives from the social

consequences of his era. That is, rather than ideas, Eliot manifests the social outcomes of the war trauma in his surrounding. In terms of the philosophic discourse, the existence of the various puzzles in Prufrock's mind indicates that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" should be considered as an essay of the soul which defines the existence of a world of illusions, suffering, and self-deception while putting forward the epigraph, "Let us go, then you and I" (Ward, 1973: 13). Prufrock just experiences a world of futility, anxiety and shock.

The title, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is primarily is a psychological discourse in the modern context. The whole of the poem is a pessimist rather than an optimist reflection and a critical insight in the modern context rather than a romantic orientation. Eliot does not only reflect the social process, but also pinpoints the ideological activity of his time by indicating how individuals are influenced mentally by the disastrous wars. Eliot pinpoints the nature of society and deals with the relationship of the individual to the changing social order.

Similar to T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf depicts the influence of war traumas on individual psychologies in *Mrs. Dalloway* as "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing." This quotation directly points out the social and psychological circumstances the individuals have in the post-World War I period. Clarissa expresses them when she reads Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* which has the lines "Fear no more the heat of the sun/Nor the furious winter's rages" which becomes a symbol for the awakening emotions to be released from all big traumatic global changes. When she reads in the play "Fear no more," she just compares her life with what Shakespeare depicts and expresses her own disappointment.

Virginia Woolf is a writer who listened to the *Waste Land* from T. S. Eliot himself as he sang, chanted and impressed her by letting her create the Prufrock-like characters such as Septimus Warren Smith and Mrs. Dalloway. This signifies that T. S. Eliot and his writings are influential on Woolf's writing style and experiences (Tomalin, 1992: xvi). Her thematic orientation in *Mrs. Dalloway* and most of her other novels such as *The Waves*, *The Voyage Out* and *A Room of One's Own* basically reflect what T. S. Eliot emphasizes in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". The psychological states Eliot underlines in the poem are corrupted because of being in a state of estrangement. Woolf reflects such a mood in the isolated and alienated individuals in her novels. In his poem, "Prufrock", T. S. Eliot describes Prufrock in his psychological state of hopelessness and lovelessness. Similarly, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith is like Prufrock because of being in a state of desperation and disenchantment. This indicates that both Prufrock and Smith suffer from the consequences of war and this reflects the emergence of the evil in individual lives in the post-war era. Hence, Woolf pinpoints the individual "waste lands" of the inner worlds of her characters.

Virginia Woolf's novels are basically plotless and have a form of stream of consciousness technique which reflects how they are confused inside their heads

(Lodge, 1993: 27). This indicates that rather than a linear structure, Woolf's novels combine a multiplicity of thoughts as a result of the fear of existence of evil in life, the repression of patriarchal power in social life and the obsession with a state of isolation and alienation. (Tambling, 1993: 58). This would stand for a new feature of public ideology and imply the collapse of mental lives that results from war scenery.

Mrs. Dalloway describes a day in Clarissa Dalloway's life in post-World War I England. It is about the story of Clarissa Dalloway who is a self-conscious and well-known character of London social life. She has preparations for a party she is going to be the hostess. Clarissa intends to bring people together and to create happy moments via her party. She highlights her wish to be released from the insecurity of the terrible global changes, i.e., she is in a struggle to balance her inner life with the outer world. Her interest in flowers and trees signifies her feelings and emotions of happiness despite the sense of disillusionment in the traumatic world in the post-war era. While presenting the inter-war period, the story goes in between past and present as the characters reflect what they remember back and forth. In order to get ready to host a party, Clarissa Dalloway goes around London in the early morning and expresses her happy mind throughout her flashbacks of choosing a reliable husband, Richard Dalloway, instead of enigmatic Peter Walsh. A lot of people participate Clarissa's party in *Mrs. Dalloway*, including people from her past. However, Clarissa Dalloway's happiness is interrupted when she learns about Septimus Warren Smith's suicide because of his traumatic war depression especially hallucinations. Thus, in the course of the novel, Virginia Woolf hints at the mental illness that people have as a consequence of the world wars. Although Septimus Warren Smith directly demonstrates his anomic state through his suicide, there are others who suffer from some other personal matters such as alienation and isolation that again result from the trauma of war. This infers the psychological collapse in the post-world wars.

Virginia Woolf focuses on the social outcomes of the global changes and describes other "Prufrocks" as manifested via the mental disorders of Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. For instance, Clarissa Dalloway directly reflects her notions of war trauma as she expresses her anxiety and shock when she hears a tyre explode. Moreover, she reflects her anxiety when she learns about Septimus Warren Smith's post-traumatic suicide during her party. As a soldier, Septimus is an individual who experienced a catastrophic fragmentation of selfhood in the war front (Crosthwaite 2009:121-123). Paul Crosthwaite has an objective outlook on the ideological consequences of wars and reflects how terror of wars became influential on individual fragmentation as observed in through Septimus becoming an anomic character because of the inevitable outcome of the battle landscape.

Most of Virginia Woolf's novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Waves*, and *A Room of One's Own* manifest the mental state of disappointment, dissatisfaction, depression and doubt which indicate the anomic meaninglessness of individuals in the changing social world. Such a state is influential on Septimus Warren Smith for whom life is not worth living. Traumatized by World War I, the world becomes a hell from which he wishes to

escape by committing suicide (Lodge, 1993: 30). This happens to be an anomic case because Septimus is described as a man who experiences this suicide as a result of the sense of futility. Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway represent the voice of the common life in which there are different anomic cases of loneliness and the lack of interaction.

In a sociopsychological concern, Alex Zwedling interprets that Virginia Woolf depicts Clarissa Dalloway's inner world deliberately to manifest Woolf's deep control over the English social system (1988: 145). Septimus is a victim of the corrupted humanity of the World War I period. However, the party at the end of the novel ironically happens to be a wake-up call for individuals to think that wars should not be the end of life and they should go on living. Hence, Virginia Woolf emphasizes that the existence of wars would be the end of all healthy psychologies. Woolf describes the guests' thoughts related to Septimus Warren Smith's suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway*:

A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party – the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself – but how? . . . he had thrown himself from a window . . . She had once flung a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living . . . They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them, closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (Woolf, London: 202)

Signifying an escape through death reflects how characters feel loneliness, isolation, estrangement and meaninglessness in their lives in *Mrs. Dalloway*. These anomic cases in between the two world wars refer to how they are being traumatized by the consequences of the big changes. However, Woolf reflects an awakening by expressing "They went on living" which also stands for their sense of the continuity of life despite all the problematic consequences in the world, i.e. she presents Clarissa as a person who appreciates life despite all social concerns.² Yet, she also reminds the readers how her mind became confused as a result of changing social order when she expresses her disappointment over learning of a suicide.³ Clarissa also points out her existential response to the state of absurdity and meaninglessness:

² Her optimistic world view despite all social complexities is presented in the first page of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

³ Here, Clarissa connotes Virginia Woolf's stream of consciousness technique by thinking some other circumstances when she deals with a particular case. She expresses

The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with what is going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living (Woolf, 1996: 204).

This existential outlook reflects Clarissa's sense of living a life of absurdity and meaninglessness because of horror and terror within the wars. She emphasizes the continuity of the world despite the corruption of lives because of the consequences of wars and, thus, she manifests her indifference and emotional distance. The characters in the novel are indifferent to each other in their interactions. This is the time for the epiphany of embracing death in life as manifested in T.S. Eliot's "Prufrock". Here, however, Clarissa does not lose her awareness of the outer world although she responds to it at a physical level (Lee, 1988: 30). This implies that Clarissa's anomic case is different from Septimus's: whereas she experiences isolation, alienation, and estrangement via her linkage to life, Septimus is in a state of isolation, alienation, and disgust from world which leads him to commit suicide. This indicates that his loss of expectations in life is an outcome of his hopelessness. When Woolf stresses the clock striking in the aforementioned quotation, she emphasizes her awareness of time flowing rapidly and warning all humanity to be aware of their existence under any circumstances. Thus, her isolation and alienation approaches a sense of awareness rather than a state of meaninglessness. Then, here, Septimus Warren Smith becomes a "Prufrock" stereotype and happens to be a substitute for Clarissa's psychology of isolation and alienation from society.

Consequently, *Mrs. Dalloway* reflects a psychosociological evaluation of the corruption in the social lives in the post-war periods. The fear of wars creates fragmented selves as manifested in most of Woolf's novels, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*. The fragmented mental state is directly reflected in *The Waves* with the emphasis of a crisis of identity. In this novel, Bernard declares: "I am not one and simple, but complex and many." Such a mental state indicates that the characters are in a state of self-hatred, alienation, despair, and feel disgust toward the rest of the human race. Woolf goes beyond criticizing mental disorders that derive from war and reflects an existential standing towards the global horrors. Woolf focuses on the 20th century canon of post-war British Literature in a psychological aspect and reminds the possibility of the coming of a mentally ill nation in the case of the continuity of the disastrous wars. Humanity would become like the fragmented selves as reflected in the poem, "Prufrock". However, rather than the ironic title of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", this time the individuals would describe themselves through "anomic songs". Hence, Woolf uses

her stream of consciousness technique connotation via noting what she thinks in the parantheses as stated in the novel.

the novel as a vehicle for the criticism of the society she lives in. Growing fears of loneliness and disconnect as well as the incapability of overcoming hopelessness become inevitable within the global changes which contribute to the emergence of anomic cases as seen in *Mrs. Dalloway* and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

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