Mrs. Dalloway Study Guide

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway,* published in 1925, was a bestseller both in Britain and the United States despite its departure from typical novelistic style. *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf's subsequent book, *To the Lighthouse,* have generated the most critical attention and are the most widely studied of Woolf's novels.

The action of *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place during a single day in June 1923 in London, England. This unusual organizational strategy creates a special problem for the novelist: how to craft characters deep enough to be realistic while treating only one day in their lives. Woolf solved this problem with what she called a "tunneling" technique, referring to the way her characters remember their pasts. In experiencing these characters' recollections, readers derive for themselves a sense of background and history to characters that, otherwise, a narrator would have had to provide.

In a sense, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel without a plot. Instead of creating major situations between characters to push the story forward, Woolf moved her narrative by following the passing hours of a day. The book is composed of movements from one character to another, or of movements from the internal thoughts of one character to the internal thoughts of another.

Mrs. Dalloway has been called a *flâneur* novel, which means it depicts people walking about a city. (*Flâneur* is the French word for a person who enjoys walking around a city often with no other purpose than to see the sights.) The book, as is typical of the *flâneur* novel, makes the city, its parks, and its streets as interesting as the characters who inhabit them.

Clarissa Dalloway's party, which is the culminating event of the book, ties the narrative together by gathering the group of friends Clarissa thinks about throughout her day. It also concludes the secondary story of the book, the story of Septimus Warren Smith, by having Dr. Bradshaw arrive at the party and mention that one of his patients committed suicide that day.

The book's major competing themes are isolation and community, or the possibilities and limits of communicativeness, as evidenced by Clarissa's abiding sense of being alone and by her social skills, which bring people together at her parties.

Author Biography

Virginia Woolf was born in 1882 in London, England. She was the daughter of Leslie Stephen, an eminent man of letters, and Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth. The Stephen-Duckworth household had many children and was financially secure. Woolf had free rein of her father's extensive library, and was able to educate herself thoroughly.

Woolf was brought up in a scholarly and creative environment. Following her father's death in 1904, Woolf and three of her siblings moved to a house in Bloomsbury (a neighborhood of London) where they cultivated a similar atmosphere. Woolf began writing and publishing at this time, mostly literary criticism, and not yet fiction. In 1907, when her sister Vanessa (a painter) married art critic Clive Bell, Woolf and a brother moved to another house. The writers, intellectuals, and artists who met at this house played central and pivotal roles in British early twentieth-century intellectual and cultural history. They were known as the Bloomsbury group, and they espoused a number of common views; for example, most were pacifists. To Woolf, questions of gender, gender difference, and sexuality became extremely important. She was interested in the commonalties of men and women as well as their differences, and she argued that artists had androgynous minds.

Woolf began publishing fiction in 1915, and it was with her third novel (*Jacob's Room,* 1922) that she began to show maturity as a writer. *Mrs. Dalloway,* her fourth novel, is evidence of the consolidation of a major and rare fictional talent. Woolf went on to publish more novels, and these, together with her extensive non-fiction publications, amount to one of the most distinguished bodies of literature in the English language.

Virginia Woolf (then Virginia Stephen) married Leonard Woolf, a politician and writer, in 1912. Despite the success of her marriage and publishing career, she suffered bouts of mental disequilibrium throughout her life, periods of madness or near-madness that terrified her. After each recovery she was haunted by the thought that the next time she might not return to sanity. This fear, along with the depressing events of WWII, finally proved too much for her to bear. Convinced that Hitler's forces would prevail, and mired in a period of depression, Woolf committed suicide by drowning in Lewes, Sussex, England on March 28, 1941.

Plot Summary

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf is a book about Clarissa Dalloway and her life as an upper class politician's wife. The book begins in the middle of June. Clarissa Dalloway, a woman living in the Westminster section of London, is enjoying the beautiful weather and thinking about her absent friends. Clarissa thinks about the fact that the War is over, the King and Queen are nestled in the Palace, and although there are many things one may be unhappy about, the truth is that the people there loved life.

Clarissa is planning a party that will include all of the notable people in London from the Prime Minister to people in important social circles. Clarissa frets about the party and strives to make it perfect.

The reader meets Lucrezia and Septimus Warren Smith. The couple is out at the park. Rezia frets because something has happened to Septimus. He has changed since the war. It is unclear if he has become clairvoyant or mad. Rezia thinks he has lost his mind. Dr. Holmes says nothing is wrong with Septimus but that Lucrezia must keep him focused on things that are real. Septimus cannot be dissuaded from his observances and pulls into himself while he talks aloud and writes notes on the backs of envelopes. Lucrezia is horrified and tries to get Septimus away from the crowd lest someone see him. Attempts to heal Septimus fail and in the end, Septimus commits suicide.

Peter Walsh, Clarissa's love from her youth, has returned to England after spending five years in India. The relationship between Clarissa and Peter is strained. Clarissa seems cold to Peter. Clarissa is stunned to see Peter standing in front of her after all this time. She had been thinking about him almost constantly and he appeared. Peter, too, is shocked to see Clarissa. True, they had both aged. It is clear to Peter that he still has great love for Clarissa, even though she wounded him deeply when she broke it off all those years ago. Peter realizes only now that his trying to unravel the mystery of Clarissa made him critical and forced him to demand absurd things so she had no choice but to break it off.

The situation between Peter and Clarissa will never truly resolve itself and Woolf leaves it so that nothing has changed between them.

The night of the big party arrives. Clarissa fusses, delights in her guests, and strive to make sure that everyone is having a good time. Everyone says Clarissa is a perfect hostess.

It is a wonderful surprise when Clarissa's childhood friend Sally shows up. Clarissa and Peter are delighted to see her. Sally talks about how she still cannot believe, after all these years, that Clarissa married Richard Dalloway. It was clear, Sally said, that Clarissa loved Peter much more than she loved Richard. Peter is not so sure but he does know the futility of a relationship with Clarissa.

It is getting late. Clarissa notes the hour and hopes that the evening will go on as long as possible. Peter watches Clarissa. No matter what logical arguments Peter makes against it, he still loves Clarissa. Once again, she is there in front of him.

pages 1-43

pages 1-43 Summary

It is the middle of June. Clarissa Dalloway, a woman living in the Westminster section London, is enjoying the beautiful weather and thinking about her absent friends. Clarissa notices the people on the streets, the fully blossomed trees and flowers, and observes how certain days are much like a kiss from a wave. The weather makes her feel as young as she did was she was 18 years old, full of life and promise. Clarissa thinks about the fact that the War is over, the King and Queen are nestled in the Palace, and although there are many things one may be unhappy about the truth is that the people there loved life. It was the middle of June so that it was time for garden parties, polo ponies and dancing all night.

Clarissa decides to talk a walk through Westminster as Big Ben chimes the hour. She talks about people she sees along the way including her old friend Hugh Whitbread. Clarissa talks about how she loves to walk in the city that it is much better than the country. Hugh is not quite so cheerful as he has brought his ailing mother to see the doctors. Clarissa likes Evelyn Whitbread and thinks of something special to do for the woman during her weekly visit to the nursing home. Clarissa loves Hugh as they have been friends all of their lives. However, Clarissa always feels awkward and under dressed when it comes to the impeccable Hugh.

Clarissa thinks about how Hugh hates Peter Walsh and has never forgiven her for liking the man. Clarissa understands. It is obvious that Peter is superior to Hugh, yet Peter delighted one night in ridiculing Hugh and making him out to be a witless mama's boy. Peter could be intolerable, Clarissa knew, but she could not help but adore him. There was no room with Peter, however. As a couple they had argued all the time. There was no room for debate or Clarissa being right. In the end Clarissa had to break it off, turn down the marriage proposal. Instead, Clarissa had married Richard Dalloway, a man that did give her room. Peter married an Indian woman while out to sea. Clarissa was deeply wounded and angry.

Clarissa thinks about how there had been so many things bred into them all from tears to endurance and stoical qualities. She thinks about these things and how they are exhibited in Lady Bexborough. Clarissa admires Lady Bexborough more than anyone and wishes to be like her.

"She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere." (p. 9)

Clarissa thinks about this as she walks toward Bond Street and the bazaar where she would see Lady Bexborough and a large number of books laid open for perusal. There are no books that would make Evelyn Whitbread happy for even a moment, so Clarissa moves on.

Clarissa plans for that night's party, going from shop to shop and thinking about people in her life from her Uncle William to her daughter Elizabeth who was not one whit like her mother. Clarissa went to the florists where she was waited on by Miss Pym, a woman that was too eager to please. As Clarissa went about picking out flowers for the party, a chauffeured car pulled up on the opposite side of the street from Mulberry's Shop. The car created a great stir, particularly when a hand pulled down a shade to hide the identity of the important passenger. Surely it had to be someone of high rank or importance like the Queen, Prince of Wales or the Prime Minister. Everyone gawked; everyone had an opinion. Even after the car had pulled away, people stared and wondered.

Septimus Warren Smith and his wife, Lucrezia, observe the sight. People gather around Buckingham Palace. Everyone feels compelled to know who is in the car. Some people want the royals to notice the poverty, the aftermath of the war. Lucrezia tries to distract Septimus from his surroundings. The cause is lost when an airplane begins to write something in the clouds. Everyone tries to guess what will be written.

Lucrezia tries to distract Septimus over and over again. Dr. Holmes says nothing is wrong with Spetimus, not really, but that Lucrezia must keep him focused on things that are real. Septimus cannot be dissuaded from his observances and pulls into himself while he talks aloud and writes notes on the backs of envelopes. Lucrezia is horrified and tries to get Septimus away from the crowd lest someone see him.

Maisie Johnson, a newcomer to London, asks for directions. Lucrezia abruptly tells the woman the way to the Tube station and rushes off. Maisie thinks that London is very peculiar.

The author continues to give the impressions of various people including Mrs. Dempster and Mr. Bentley.

Clarissa arrives home to find her life as she had left it, with Lucy bustling around and the Irish cook, Mrs. Walker, whistling as always.

Lady Bruton had asked Richard to attend one of her famous lunch parties; Clarissa had not been invited. Clarissa goes upstairs and thinks about the emptiness of her life. She thinks about falling in love with women. Clarissa remembers her days at Bourton and falling in love with Sally Seton. The love was pure and so unlike love with a man. Clarissa had been so sheltered at Bourton and had not realized it until she met Sally.

"But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (p. 34)

Clarissa thinks about Sally and their time together while she chooses her attire for that evening's party. Her favorite green dress is torn and must be mended. Clarissa will do it herself since the maids are already far too busy. Lucy notices the dress and offers to do the mending for her mistress.

Clarissa sits with her dress in her lap when there is a knock at the door. Peter Walsh arrives and Clarissa, not having read his letter, is stunned at his appearance.

pages 1-43 Analysis

Clarissa Dalloway is a thinly veiled Virginia Woolf, a woman that struggles with self-effacement, dislike, unhappiness and unease. Clarissa seems to have it all on the outside but on the inside she is filled with doubt and at times feels a bit crazy. Peter Walsh is always on Clarissa's mind. She loves and dislikes Peter all at the same time - he is a comfortable misery. Clarissa nearly married Peter, the man who taught her many things, but realized that she could never live up to his standards. Clarissa feels as if she can never live up to anyone's standards.

Clarissa is fond of viewing things as "a horror" and says so repeatedly. There is a natural propensity to be overly dramatic and filled with pity for herself and a life that is going by much too quickly.

Clarissa tries to enjoy the things around her and does so briefly before she talks about being unworthy. The servants in Clarissa's house are treated very well. Clarissa apologizes for mostly everything and strives to be generous and kind-hearted to all.

The memory of Sally Seton is joyful to Clarissa. Sally came into Clarissa's life in the bloom of youth when everything was innocent. Through Sally, Clarissa began to see the world as it is. Clarissa's choices were made more out of duty than desire and she questions why she keeps falling in love with women.

Septimus does not understand how he began to see through people, to see his dead friend Evan, and to know what was going to happen. He tries to explain it to Rezia but it never comes out right. Both know that their marriage is over.

Peter walks along watching the activity in and around the park. He thinks about returning to England after five years.

"Those five years - 1918 to 1923 - had been, he suspected, somehow very important" (pg. 79.)

Everything seemed different from newspapers to the way people dressed. Everything had changed and Peter was not so sure that he liked it. The politeness of society had waned.

Peter thinks about his connection to Sally Seton and the things they had in common. Peter tries to talk himself out of being in love with Clarissa after all these years. Peter never could figure her out no matter how hard he tried. Clarissa cared too much about social rank and was married to a man, cultured but thick headed, who chose to waste his life in politics. Although Clarissa had aged, there was still some joy left in her.

"Anyhow there was no bitterness in her; none of that sense of moral virtue which is so repulsive in good women" (pg. 87.)

pages 44-87

pages 44-87 Summary

Clarissa is so surprised at seeing Peter that for a moment, she cannot remember his name. It fades quickly. Clarissa is ashamed that Peter is seeing her mend a dress. Peter's life is so adventurous and exciting and hers clearly is not. Does Peter wonder what she does every day besides going to parties and mending dresses?

Clarissa brings up the days at her father's house. Peter is tormented by remembering those days and wishes Clarissa would stop. How could Clarissa understand the level of Peter's heartbreak? Now Peter will have to tell Clarissa about Daisy, a woman that pales in comparison to his old love.

Peter blurts out that he is in love with the wife of a Major in the Indian Army. The couple has two children and Peter has returned to London to see about a divorce. Peter worries that he is a failure in Clarissa's eyes. Clarissa thinks about everything Peter has done and how she cannot measure up. She also thinks that it is ridiculous that Peter should be in love at his age.

Peter sits on the sofa and cries, not knowing what to do and thinking about the mess on his hands. Clarissa kisses him without thinking about it and then realizes that perhaps she should have married Peter.

"If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!" (pg. 50.)

Peter is amazed that Clarissa should still have power over him. Just as Peter seizes Clarissa's shoulders and asks if she is happy with Richard, Elizabeth strolls into the room. Despite Clarissa's protestations, Peter leaves.

Peter walks from the house thinking about how Clarissa has become hard, how Clarissa had refused him. Peter also thinks about those days in Bourton where he tried to get along with Clarissa's father but found that it was not possible.

Peter dreams of being a solitary traveler having gone beyond the here and now, wondering what it would be like to never go back again.

Peter thinks about the days at Bourton when he was madly in love with Clarissa. He recalls dinner parties at which Clarissa was the perfect hostess. Peter did not like to share Clarissa's attention and at times he would sit and talk with Clarissa's maiden aunt Helena. Helena took pity on Peter. Clarissa finally came to fetch him. Richard Dalloway had arrived and was introduced around. When Peter met Richard he immediately knew that Clarissa would marry him. Peter was jealous and angry although no one had wronged him. Peter was also jealous of the amount of time that Clarissa spent with Sally Seton, the bold, brash and daring young woman that smoked cigars in her bedroom.

It was clear to Peter that Clarissa had fallen for Richard just by the way she blushed when someone mentioned his name. The end had come for Peter and Clarissa. Peter badgered Clarissa until she ended it. Peter was devastated.

Life went on.

The story switches back to Rezia Smith. Rezia walks along thinking about Septimus. The Septimus she had married was gone. That man was replaced with a man that said cruel and wicked things, talked to himself and to a dead man. The man had been a friend that died in the War. Rezia did not understand it. She only knew that she should not be the one to suffer.

"Everyone has friends who were killed in the War. Everyone gives up something with they marry. She had given up her home" (pg. 73.)

pages 44-87 Analysis

The relationship between Clarissa and Peter is strained. Clarissa seems cold to Peter. Clarissa is stunned to see Peter standing in front of her after all this time. She had been thinking about him almost constantly and he appeared. Peter, too, is shocked to see Clarissa. True, they had both aged. It is clear to Peter that he still has great love for Clarissa, even though she wounded him deeply when she broke it off all those years ago. Peter realizes only now that his trying to unravel the mystery of Clarissa made him critical and forced him to demand absurd things so she had no choice but to break it off. Peter feels as if he has made a sniveling fool out of himself while Clarissa sat in her room, clutching her dress and being cool as a cucumber. Peter does not realize that Clarissa is in love with him, too.

Septimus is a curious specimen. It is unclear if he has become clairvoyant or mad. Rezia thinks he has lost his mind, writing down odd words and phrases, going into near catatonic states, talking to his dead friend Evan, making predictions about the future. Rezia thinks only about her happiness. Since Dr. Holmes says there is nothing wrong with Septimus, Rezia feels like she has little recourse but to leave him. Rezia cannot stand the strange and erratic behavior any more.

Peter laments the years that he was gone.

The author slides easily from one person to another without any breaks in the narrative. While the characters may be connected in some way it is somewhat confusing to switch threads in the middle of a page. For example, the narrative about Peter switches to Rezia and then back again. The connection is that both are walking in Regent's Park and see some of the same things. This leads the reader to suspect that more ties will be made clear in the future.

pages 88-130

pages 88-130 Summary

Peter continues his stroll in Regent's Park, thinking about Clarissa and how cold she seemed. Clarissa was in love with him, this he knew.

"But women, he thought, shitting his pocket-knife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men" (pg. 89.)

Peter and Rezia both spot an old woman with a deformed hand asking for coppers. Both have seen the woman before and pity her.

Rezia thinks about the appointment she and Septimus have with Sir William Bradshaw. Rezia believes that the man will be able to cure Septimus at once. Rezia fetches Septimus and they walk off for the appointment. Along the way Septimus thinks about the message he carries.

"So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?" (pg. 92.)

Septimus thinks about his youth, his love of Shakespeare and Keats. Those things still had appeal for him. He could still think, still reason, and appreciate the beauty of words. However, Septimus could no longer feel. The feelings had died in the War. Septimus had not cared that people died, that Evans was killed. Septimus could feel nothing when Rezia cried in despair and loneliness. No matter what Septimus did, there was a sense of unfeeling blankness.

When Septimus was young, he wanted nothing more than to write. Writing was not a productive or admirable trait in Stroud, so Septimus left home for London where he was swallowed up along with thousands of other Smiths.

Then there was the War. Septimus had survived. He had excelled and been promoted. Unlike many, Septimus made it home alive. Yet, Septimus had lost all feeling. Rezia talked about having a baby - she was getting old. Septimus had no feelings about that. He had no passion for Rezia. In fact Septimus had never loved Rezia at all. Rezia sent for Dr. Holmes who could not find anything wrong with Septimus. The doctor visited frequently and became alarmed when Septimus talked about death. The doctor came daily and still could not find anything wrong with Septimus.

Rezia is hopeful about Sir William Bradshaw. The man has a great reputation, all of which he earned through sheer hard work and ability. The fee to see him is quite high but worth it. Sir William could diagnose an illness in the first 2-3 minutes and seemed to be infallible.

Sir William speaks to Septimus and most of the answers are given by Rezia. Sir William is annoyed at Dr. Holmes' recommendation to take bromide. Sir William can plainly see that Septimus has had a complete mental and physical breakdown.

Rezia is fretful and desperate. She asks Sir William if Septimus has gone mad.

"Sir William never spoke of 'madness'; he called it not having a sense of proportion" (pg. 107.)

The threat of suicide is what causes Sir William to tell Rezia that Septimus should go into a home. Septimus is not fit to be out and about as he is a danger to others but more importantly, to himself. Rezia is devastated. She had gone to Sir William for help and now things were even worse.

Sir William says that proportion is a tricky thing to grasp and control.

Hugh Whitbread was invited to Lady Bruton's for lunch as was Richard Dalloway. Hugh knew that Lady Bruton preferred Dalloway but the pair had been friends for twenty years and had always delighted in one another's company. Hugh and Richard met on the steps of Lady Bruton's house. Lady Bruton accepted the flowers from Hugh and confessed that she invited only the two men because she needed help. It turns out that the help was nothing more than editing a letter she wishes to send to the Times. To Lady Bruton, organizing an African Safari during the War had been easier. Fortunately, she had Richard and Hugh. Hugh made notes and corrections.

Hugh and Richard left and walk down the street together. They stop at a jeweler's where Hugh hopes to buy a Spanish necklace for his wife, Evelyn. Richard never thinks to buy presents for Clarissa. Not trusting his taste in jewelry, Richard decides to buy flowers.

pages 88-130 Analysis

It is clear to Sir William that Septimus has had a complete break due to what is now known as post traumatic stress disorder. The suicide threats worry Sir William. Every time Septimus says something that Rezia finds inappropriate or damning, she interrupts and correct or contradicts what Septimus has said. Septimus keeps muttering about committing a crime but when Sir William asks about it, Septimus cannot remember.

Rezia had hoped to be rid of Septimus but now that he is to be put into a home, she is fretful and upset. Rezia suddenly feels abandoned and as usual, she worries much more about herself than Septimus who is obviously very ill.

There is a strange rivalry between Richard and Hugh although neither seems to realize it. Both love Clarissa but in different ways. Richard is more of a working class man, albeit well off and successful. Hugh seems to be a person that comes from pedigree, much like Lady Bruton. Lady Bruton likes both men and chooses to see only the good in them. Rather, she would never speak ill of them like Clarissa would.

Richard dislikes Hugh's upper crust nature and demands. Richard thinks that he should buy Clarissa a present. This idea is spawned from Hugh's decision to purchase a necklace for Evelyn as well as the fact that Peter Walsh is back in town. Richard needs to protect Clarissa and keep the man from invading his territory.

pages 131-174

pages 131-174 Summary

Richard returns home, flowers in hand. Clarissa is surprised but thrilled at the red and white roses. Those are the only flowers that in her mind, should ever be cut. Clarissa did not know the reason for the flowers but did not care. She chats with Richard but does not really hear or understand what he is supposed to be doing at Committee that afternoon. It has something to do with the Armenians or Albanians, neither of which held any interest for Clarissa Dalloway. Richard lets the flowers convey his love for Clarissa. There is something that prevents him from saying the words, no matter what happens or what she says. Richard tries to make it plain that he is happy and loves Clarissa; he simply cannot say it.

Richard brings pillows and a blanket downstairs, insisting that Clarissa rest for a full hour after lunch. The doctor had told Clarissa that once and ever since, Richard has taken it to heart. Richard returns to the House of Commons and Clarissa proceeds to lie down on the sofa.

Clarissa had no real intention of falling asleep, but she did. Miss Kilman and Elizabeth come downstairs from their lesson. Miss Kilman does not want to be in the same room with the likes of Clarissa Dalloway and is grateful to see that the woman is asleep. Elizabeth has forgotten her gloves and must go back upstairs. Clarissa awakes and speaks to Miss Kilman. No matter what Clarissa says, Miss Kilman takes it as an offense or slight in some way. Miss Kilman loathes Mrs. Dalloway. Clarissa pokes fun at Miss Kilman for talking to herself and for her piety as a born again Christian.

Miss Kilman and Elizabeth go to the Stores. They look around but Miss Kilman will not buy anything. First of all, Miss Kilman is quite poor. Aside from that, nothing she wears is pretty or fits well. She simply looks old and dumpy. No man would ever look at her. Miss Kilman feels even worse when she thinks about Clarissa. She states that she used to envy people like Clarissa Dalloway but now she just pities them.

Miss Kilman's opinion of Clarissa is not good. As a history teacher, Miss Kilman sees great value in education. As a woman that has worked her way up in the world, such laziness as exhibited by Clarissa is repugnant. The woman is spoiled. She has everything she could ever want in a monetary sense. However, when it comes to intelligence, independence or fulfillment, Clarissa has nothing.

Miss Kilman and Elizabeth go to tea. They enjoy themselves to a degree. Elizabeth is eager to leave but waits for Miss Kilman to finish her tea. At the first chance, Elizabeth leaves. Miss Kilman is upset that Elizabeth is gone.

Miss Kilman thinks a lot about church and being brought into the light. It happened two years and three months ago at Mr. Whittaker's church. Miss Kilman struggles with her

feelings about Clarissa, inwardly loathing her and trying to reconcile those feelings to her newfound faith and recommended treatment of peace, not judgment.

Miss Kilman walks along the street and ends up at the tower of Westminster Cathedral. There are many people there, praying. Mr. Fletcher observes the people and talks to many of them. He sees Miss Kilman praying hard. Mr. Fletcher observes Miss Kilman's clothes and sees her as ragged and disorderly. Mr. Fletcher, looking quite dapper, ignores Miss Kilman.

Elizabeth decides to take the omnibus. The weather is beautiful and Elizabeth sees no reason to go straight home. Instead she will ride atop the bus and enjoy the wind and the view.

Elizabeth thinks a lot about her Chinese heritage and/or looks. She thinks about being a pioneer as she walks toward Fleet Street and then toward St. Paul's Cathedral. There is a lot of noise but Elizabeth revels in it. This is a place that is full of life but not one that would be patronized by the Dalloways, particularly not at this time of day. Elizabeth worries about the time, determined to ensure that she will not be late for the party that evening.

It is good to be out in the open way from the stores and from Miss Kilman. Miss Kilman always encourages Elizabeth to be who and what ever she can be as all things are open to women in Elizabeth's generation.

Elizabeth knows that Miss Kilman loves her openly and without reservation, a fact which somewhat puzzles Elizabeth. It sometimes makes Elizabeth feel guilty for wanting to get away. After all, Miss Kilman has been more than kind, lending her books, teaching and encouraging Elizabeth every step of the way.

Elizabeth realizes it is time to go home. The clouds have begun to change the look of the day.

Septimus is lying on the sofa in the sitting room. He watches the shadows in the room and feels calm. Septimus' heart tells him that there is no reason to fear; he feels as if he is floating.

Rezia sits and wrings her hands as she watches Septimus. It is not right for a woman to have to watch her husband in this condition as he lay there smiling, hearing and seeing things that only he can see and hear. Rezia writes when and what Septimus tells her to write.

"She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his mind; wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up. But she heard nothing." (p. 157)

Rezia is working on a hat for Mrs. Peters, the married daughter of Mrs. Filmer. Rezia thinks the hat is too small. Septimus agrees and thinks it looks like a hat that would be

worn by an organ grinder's monkey. Rezia does not like Mrs. Peters but Mrs. Filmer has been kind her them. Septimus and Rezia joke about the hat. For a moment, Rezia is filled with joy, seeing a fleeting glimpse of the old Septimus.

Rezia finishes working on the hat and tries it on. She and Septimus have a good laugh. Rezia leaves the room to meet the paper girl, happy about the change in Septimus' demeanor. It all changes when Rezia is gone. Septimus feels all alone again in a sort of blackness. Rezia learns that Mrs. Filmer is not going to see her daughter after all, so all of the hard work was wasted.

Rezia thinks about the first time she met Septimus. It was in Milan. Rezia knew right away that Septimus was English. They were quite different but Rezia was intrigued. Septimus wanted to introduce Rezia to the things he loved, including Shakespeare. That was before she could even read a children's story in English. Many of those things were lost on Rezia but she was fascinated by the unusual qualities in Septimus. Septimus was serious and thoughtful; older and experienced. He could help her in ways and she could return the favor.

Septimus thinks about what Sir William had said about being separated. "The people we are most fond of are not good for us when we are ill." (p. 165) Bradshaw went on to say that Septimus had to be taught how to rest. To do that, Septimus must be separated from Rezia.

In a moment of lucidity, Rezia tries to explain that they must be separated because Septimus spoke of suicide. Rezia shows Septimus the things he had written and drawn or had asked her to write or draw. Rezia was gentle and said that some were beautiful. Rezia collects the papers and puts them into a neat bundle. Rezia says she will hide the papers where no one will find them. There is nothing the doctors can do to keep them apart.

Dr. Holmes arrives later, saying that he has come as a friend. Rezia says he cannot see Septimus. Dr. Holmes will not be dissuaded. Holmes sets Rezia aside and goes to the bedroom to see Septimus. Septimus hears the doctor coming and thinks that there is only one answer. Septimus does not want to die. Before Holmes can reach him, Septimus throws himself out the window and falls to his death. Holmes tries to keep it from Rezia as no one should see that kind of tragedy.

Peter walks along the street and notices the sound of the siren that is taking Septimus' body to the hospital. Peter thinks about all of the things that might have happened to the poor person in the ambulance.

Peter thinks about his relationship with Clarissa as well as his friendship with Sally Seton. It is odd that some relationships never change despite time and distance apart. Sally had a great deal of impact on Peter even though they hadn't seen each other in many years. Peter was still trying to understand Clarissa's life. Peter thinks that in order to know and understand anyone, one must know and understand the people and circumstances that affect her. For example, the conversation Peter was having with

Clarissa was interrupted by Elizabeth, a person that mattered a great deal to Clarissa and therefore solidly impacted Peter even though Elizabeth was not a part of his life.

Peter returns to the hotel and receives a stack of letters from the clerk. One of the letters was written by Clarissa. Why must she plague him so? The letter must have been written immediately after he left the house. Clarissa simply said that it was heavenly to see him. Peter is tormented.

pages 131-174 Analysis

Richard is the consummate Englishman. Although he loves Clarissa deeply, there is no way for him to get the words to surface. Richard does try and having been married for so long, Clarissa understands what he is trying to say without words.

Miss Kilman is a paradox. She professes to be a born again Christian and preaches about tolerance and being one of God's children yet she is hypocritical when it comes to Clarissa Dalloway. Miss Kilman utterly loathes and despises Clarissa for her empty and frivolous lifestyle and the fact that she does not recognize Elizabeth's finer qualities. In Miss Kilman's eyes, Clarissa is vapid and worthless. Miss Kilman does try to right her thinking to align with her Christian ways but often fails. Miss Kilman loves Elizabeth although the relationship seems peculiar from that end. Miss Kilman is jealous of Clarissa's bond with Elizabeth and tries to think of ways to keep Elizabeth with her.

Elizabeth's Asian looks and obvious differences are never addressed although they are mentioned repeatedly.

Rezia realizes that she cannot part from Septimus. The couple plans to hide the evidence of Septimus' madness so that they will not be separated. Dr. Holmes, the one who had prescribed bromide for Septimus' ailments, suddenly seems to understand the seriousness of Septimus' issues and forces his way into the bedroom. It seems that just when Rezia and Septimus have come to an agreement about what to do, Septimus is pushed to commit suicide. It is unclear where Rezia is at that moment as Mrs. Filmer keeps insisting that someone should tell Rezia what has happened.

Peter still struggles with understanding Clarissa.

pages 175-215

pages 175-215 Summary

Peter thinks about how things with Clarissa never would have worked out. The relationship never came naturally, not like the one he had with Daisy. Peter always felt like he had to do and say things just right with Clarissa. He always seemed to be criticizing her or trying to decipher her moods and relationships with others. That had not changed in all the time they were apart. In some ways, although he loved her, Clarissa was foreign to Peter.

It was not that way with Daisy. With Daisy everything was easy, without a struggle, even though Daisy was 24 years old and married with two children. One of Peter's confidants asked what the consequences would be for Daisy. There were social barriers to be overcome and if Daisy left her husband, surely she would lose her children.

Peter thinks about the people he has met at parties before - like the Morrises. Peter admired the Morrises and regrets that they have moved away. Peter decides that he will attend Clarissa's party and take an opportunity to speak to Richard about what the conservatives were doing in India.

The details of the party are being attended to and the entire Dalloway house is in an uproar. People have started to arrive. There are many different types of people, including those that are famous either in some celebrity style or because of their position in the government. The Prime Minister will arrive as will many other important dignitaries. Clarissa is elated. Behind the scenes things are a well organized whirlwind. Mrs. Walker has everything under control although she does not like having to delegate tasks as they may not be done her way or live up to her standards. Mrs. Walker knows that the salmon will be underdone as it always is nervous enough about it to give the pudding to Jenny. Mrs. Walker simply cannot do it all. Lucy stops in to give updates to Mrs. Walker, including how lovely Elizabeth looks in her gown. There are other helpers at the party, such as Mrs. Parkinson and Mrs. Ellen Barnet who had been with the family for more than forty years and came every summer to help with the ladies.

There are great, lengthy descriptions of the people and events at the party. Clarissa frets over small details, gushes over her guests, and laments that she hadn't thought of this or that little thing. Peter arrives and Richard is thrilled to see him. The Prime Minister arrives and Clarissa shows him around. Lady Bruton also arrives and although she likes Clarissa, has nothing to say to her at all. Clarissa's Aunt Helena, is not dead after all, and has come to the party. In her eighties the woman is feeble but present. However, she does not remember Peter Walsh.

Sally Seton arrives unexpectedly. Clarissa is thrilled to see her. Sally happened to be in town and heard about the party so she invited herself hoping to have some time with her old friend. Clarissa knows Sally had married a long time ago but is surprised to learn

that she has five boys. There is some sense of vitality Sally once had but everything else seems to have washed away as if the woman was wrung out. Sally sits with Peter and the two talk about the old days.

Sir William and Lady Bradshaw arrive. Clarissa asks Lady Bradshaw about their son, who goes to school at Eton. Clarissa always feels hopelessly inept around some of these people. Sir William is talking to Richard about some Bill that is in the House. Clarissa overhears something about shell shock but assumes that it is part of the Bill. Later she would hear how a man who served in the army had just committed suicide.

Clarissa is not pleased that Sir William should talk about death at her party. Still, Clarissa thinks of all the fussing she had done that day while a man lay dying on the ground after jumping out of a window.

Clarissa and Richard had talked about Sir William. Both liked Lady Bradshaw but neither liked Sir William. There was something about his smell, Richard had said. There was something about his demeanor, the way he talked and the airs he put on in front of others. Still, Richard was polite and discussed the Bill and the dead man.

Clarissa continues to fuss and make sure that everyone is having a good time. Everyone says Clarissa is a perfect hostess.

Sally and Peter talk about the old days; the way Clarissa looked; how it was at Bourton; how Hugh had kissed Sally as a type of "punishment" for saying women should have the right to vote.

Sally talks about how she still cannot believe, after all these years, that Clarissa married Richard Dalloway. It was clear, Sally said, that Clarissa loved Peter much more than she loved Richard. Peter is not so sure but he does know the futility of a relationship with Clarissa.

The author continues to observe the behaviors of the people at the party, how each admires one person or another or chooses to avoid this or that one. Peter thoroughly enjoys spending time with Sally. The adventures of their youth kept them close friends even though they had not seen one another in years. Peter still could not bring himself to call Sally "Lady Rosseter," as if it was some foreign concept. Sally was just Sally.

It is getting late. Clarissa notes the hour and hopes that the evening will go on as long as possible. How she loved entertaining and being in the midst of all these famous and notable people. Peter watches Clarissa. No matter what logical arguments Peter could make against it, he still loves Clarissa. And, once again, she was there in front of him.

pages 175-215 Analysis

Peter knows he has not always made wise decisions. He has always fallen in love with the wrong women and has often made foolish choices. Falling in love with Daisy is more about keeping his youth and taking care of someone rather than actual love. There is a

part of Peter that regrets losing Clarissa even though it is obvious that it was never a good match. The letter from Clarissa bothers Peter much more than it should and yet Peter is unsure why.

This last section gives many details about the party at the Dalloway house. Clarissa works hard at being the perfect hostess. To some it may seem a useless or frivolous skill but to Clarissa, it is of the utmost importance to be able to entertain, particularly this crowd of people who were high up on the social ladder, were wealthy or notable in some way.

Each person at the party scrutinizes the others. Some are old friends or rather, acquaintances, who have a place at the party but none are particularly close. For example, Lady Bruton likes Clarissa but they have no common interests. Lady Bruton had no idea what to say to Clarissa and the pair fumbles through the greeting. Other guests are not particularly liked, such as Sir William, especially after he begins talking about Septimus' suicide. However, Clarissa likes Lady Bradshaw and the couple is quite distinguished.

Peter and Sally have the most to talk about. Chatting about days gone by the couple tries to recapture some of their youth. Peter struggles more with present day while Sally seems content yet both relishes those long ago days at Bourton.

Peter knows that even if he marries Daisy, it will not work. There is a part of him that will always be in love with Clarissa Dalloway.

Characters

Dr. Bradshaw

See Sir William Bradshaw

Sir William Bradshaw

While Dr. Bradshaw, unlike Dr. Holmes, immediately grasps the gravity and nature of Septimus's condition, he is still not a likable character. He seems very similar to Dr. Holmes. The book's argument against these doctors is that they are primarily concerned with managing individual cases of social and psychological distress without being interested in the causes of such problems. Thus, these doctors are still a part of the problem. They help to maintain the status quo by smoothing over difficulties instead of approaching psychological disturbance as evidence of deep social problems that must be addressed.

Lady Bruton

Lady Bruton is the character with whom Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread have lunch. She is a woman of strong character and active in public and political life. She always uses her influence in matters about which she feels strongly. Her new interest is in emigration, that is, encouraging young British couples to emigrate to Canada, one of the British Commonwealth countries. She asks Richard and Hugh to revise her letter to the editorial section of the major London newspaper, the *Times,* the forum in which she plans to air her views.

Daisy

Daisy is referred to in passing as the woman whom Peter Walsh is to marry. Peter is in London arranging matters for her divorce, among other business, as she is presently married.

Clarissa Dalloway

Clarissa Dalloway is the principal character of *Mrs. Dalloway,* since it is her party that gives definition to the narrative and her point of view dominates the book. She was born Clarissa Parry, and the day the novel takes place, she is approximately fifty years old. Her husband is Richard Dalloway, and they have one child, Elizabeth. The overwhelming impression Clarissa gives is that she is a solitary, even isolated, being, and that she is often consumed with thoughts or feelings of death and mortality. This is not only because her thoughts of friends are for those of her youth and not present

ones, but also because she seems to desire isolation. She chooses Richard Dalloway over Peter Walsh as a husband not because she loves him more, but because she believes Richard will not consume all of her personality and time, or all of her emotional and intellectual reserves. Clarissa sleeps in her own room, in a small single bed that is likened to a coffin, and such suggestions and imagery of isolation and death surround her throughout the book.

The reader gains a sense of Clarissa's character both from her own thoughts and from what other characters, especially Peter, think about her. Besides the fact that she has inspired love, which speaks well of her, she is also someone whom others, and herself, think flawed. Peter's notion that she is the "perfect hostess" sums up this suspicion of her weakness. Clarissa is well-off and does not work, putting her in a position to cultivate her preferences, which are the pursuits of beauty and social harmony. While she knows that these are worthy pursuits, she and her friends nevertheless wonder whether this is a wholly ethical way to live. The question she and they ask is whether or not she should be more like her husband or Lady Bruton and take a more obviously practical role in public and political life.

Elizabeth Dalloway

Elizabeth Dalloway is Clarissa's daughter. She is just coming of age, and she is somewhat in the thrall of her history tutor, Doris Kilman. However, Elizabeth is also her own person. When she goes out on a shopping trip with Miss Kilman, she soon parts from her tutor and steals a few hours to be by herself before she must return home to get ready for her mother's party.

Richard Dalloway

Richard Dalloway, despite being Clarissa's husband, does not play a large role in the novel. He was not as close to Clarissa as Peter and Sally were during their youthful days. Rather, in the various characters' memories of their mutual past, Richard is a late arrival on the youthful scene. He arrives around the time Clarissa is thinking about marriage and presents himself as the perfect husband for her, in contrast to Peter. He is a politician and member of Parliament and the Conservative Party, demonstrating Clarissa's and his relative social and political conservatism, especially compared to Peter and Sally.

Ellie Henderson

Ellie is Clarissa's cousin, whom Clarissa invites to her party at the last minute at the request of a mutual acquaintance. Ellie is not well-off and gets out very seldom, so she is grateful to have the opportunity to attend such an exciting affair.

Dr. Holmes

Dr. Holmes is an overbearing and controlling doctor who does not understand Septimus's condition and whose ignorance and arrogance do Septimus more harm than good. His arrival at Septimus's apartment is the last straw for the young man. Rather than fall under Holmes's control, Septimus throws himself out of a window, killing himself.

Miss Doris Kilman

Doris Kilman is a single, educated woman to whom life has not been particularly kind or just. While she possessed employment of some security before the war, her refusal to jump on the war bandwagon and call all Germans enemies made her unpopular and caused her to be dismissed from her post. Left to fend for herself during the lean war years, she scrapes together a living from incidental tutoring and lecturing. She feels great bitterness about her misfortunes and develops a religious fanaticism that makes her extremely unpopular with Clarissa, who fears and resents the woman's influence on Elizabeth.

Lucy

Lucy is the principal housemaid in the Dalloway home, and she and the cook are primarily responsible for readying the house for the party.

Aunt Parry

See Miss Helena Parry

Miss Helena Parry

Clarissa's aunt is a minor character in the book. She figures early on as the relative at Bourton whom the younger people seem to enjoy shocking. She surprises Peter at the end of the book by still being alive and by being present at the party.

Sylvia Parry

Sylvia, Clarissa's sister, is only mentioned in passing, but is significant nevertheless. She was killed by a falling tree at Bourton. The name "Sylvia" is Latinate, meaning "wild" or "woods." Her death signifies the death of youth and freedom, as Clarissa's freedom and youth ended at Bourton when she decided to marry. That is, her life since Bourton has been one in which she is not so much her own person as Richard's wife.

Rezia

See Lucrezia Warren Smith

Lady Rosseter

See Sally Seton

Sally Seton

Sally, with Peter and Clarissa, was a member of the close triangle of friends who often spent time together at Bourton. Sally delighted her friends with her vibrant personality and her legendary exploits. Clarissa was so taken by Sally that she fell in love with her, as she realizes years later. Sally, like Clarissa, went on to marry, marrying a selfmade man whose success eventually earns him high social distinction, giving Sally the title "Lady Rosseter."

Lucrezia Warren Smith

Lucrezia, or Rezia, is Septimus's wife. He met her in Italy where he was stationed for part of WWI, as Italy was one of Britain's allies during the war. While she was happy to marry Septimus and set out to a foreign country, now in London she is in despair because Septimus is no longer the same man she married. His war trauma is now deepseated and advanced and she finds herself alone and confused about what is happening to her husband.

Septimus Warren Smith

After Clarissa, Septimus is the character of most importance. His story parallels Clarissa's to a certain extent, as both characters are radically isolated and seem at odds with prevailing forces in the world. Septimus came to London as a young man in search of a career, and he showed early promise. He was an excellent worker interested in furthering his education, but then he went off to war. He returned from the war having fought bravely, but also with shell shock, a condition little understood at the time. He and his wife first seek help from a general practitioner, instead of immediately consulting the psychological specialist, Dr. Bradshaw, demonstrating people's unfamiliarity with mental disease and how to manage it at the time. Septimus is a portrait of a distressed mind, going through the hours of his last day, entertaining delusional thoughts and experiencing hallucinations, and ultimately, killing himself.

Peter Walsh

Peter Walsh is an Anglo-Indian, that is, a British citizen who worked in India during Britain's administrative colonial control of that country. At the time of the book's events, he is visiting London. Peter is defined mostly by his having been deeply in love with Clarissa Dalloway and by his intention, during his youth, to marrying her. In fact, he still seems to be in love with her, despite having married after she rejected him, and despite the fact that he is planning to marry for a second time. Of the group of close, youthful friends, Sally, Clarissa and himself, he seems more like Sally than like Clarissa. Sally and Peter were very lively; they took chances and espoused forward-looking political and social views.

Hugh Whitbread

Hugh Whitbread is deemed by most characters in the book (Peter, Sally, Richard) to be dull and uninteresting. There is the sense that he is a little ridiculous and quite conventional. Clarissa has the most sympathy for him as she appreciates his good qualities. Foremost amongst his good points are his loyalty and obedience. He always tried to please his mother and he looks after his ailing and fragile wife, Evelyn, dutifully.

Clarissa Dalloway

Clarissa Dalloway is the main character in the story. She is in her mid-fifties, married to Lord Richard Dalloway, a politician. Clarissa's life consists mostly of being a politician's wife. This means shopping for the right clothes and furnishings, keeping up her home with the labor being supplied by servants, ensuring that Elizabeth receives a good education, and entertaining distinguished and notable guests.

The story opens with Clarissa, a woman living in the Westminster section London, is enjoying the beautiful weather and thinking about her absent friends. Clarissa notices the people on the streets, the fully blossomed trees and flowers, and observes how certain days are much like a kiss from a wave. The weather makes her feel as young as she did was she was 18 years old, full of life and promise.

Clarissa cares a great deal about propriety and social standing. This does not endear her to everyone although it does make her a good hostess.

At times, Clarissa is fretful. She takes the smallest things and proclaims them to be a "horror!" Clarissa often overreacts and is quite self-centered, albeit it not in a completely negative way. While Clarissa works hard at being perfect, she is constantly worried about being or at least appearing inferior.

There are parts of Clarissa's life that sometimes puzzle her. This includes the demeanor of her daughter, Elizabeth, who is nothing like her mother. Clarissa is somewhat

frivolous; Elizabeth is studious. Clarissa is quite shaken when she sees Peter and has mixed emotions about him being back in London.

Peter Walsh

Peter Walsh is a 52-year-old man that has returned to London after having spent five years in India. Peter is going through a mid-life crisis, although it is his nature to make impetuous and somewhat foolish decisions. After breaking up with Clarissa, Peter took off on a ship for India, marrying a girl on the ship on the rebound. Of course, the marriage did not last. Upon Peter's return, it is discovered that he has placed himself in a bigger mess this time, having fallen in love with a woman less than half his age, married with two children. Peter intends to get a divorce while others try to talk him out of it.

Peter is still an attractive man and curiously fascinating. Peter is well read and well traveled. Peter has noticed a lot about himself in the years that he has been away from London. Peter has matured. Although Peter realizes that he still has some feelings for Clarissa, he is now in love with Daisy. Deep down, Peter knows that the relationship with Daisy is a mistake. Going back to London under the pretense of getting a divorce allows Peter to revisit the old haunts, to see the people that had once been so important in his life.

Meeting with Clarissa and Sally reinforces Peter's attachment to his past. In the end, Peter must either give into his love for Clarissa or return to India.

Lord Richard Dalloway

Lord Richard Dalloway is a man in his mid-fifties. Dalloway, married to Clarissa, is seen as being a simple but intelligent man, one that loves Shakespeare, his wife, and the law. Richard is simple in his tastes as well and is not insecure in his marriage.

Lady Sally Seton Rosseter

Lady Sally Seton Rosseter is Clarissa's best friend from her youth. Sally opened a whole new world for Clarissa and Peter and both are grateful. Peter and Clarissa had a brief and somewhat chaste affair.

Lucrezia Warren Smith

Lucrezia "Rezia" Warren Smith is an Italian woman that moved to Italy to marry an Englishman. Rezia is demanding, humble, devote, loving, and selfish.

Septimus Warren Smith

Septimus Warren Smith is a man who returned from the War a changed man. Septimus still loves his literature and philosophy but the ordinary things now escape him. Septimus sees and hears things that no one else can see or hear. There seems to be no viable treatment. Septimus commits suicide.

Lady Bruton

Lady Millicent Bruton is a wealthy woman of society, a grand dame, highly regarded by everyone in London. Lady Bruton chooses to live in a man's world of politics and things of intellect rather than the things that inspire other ladies of leisure.

Sir William Bradshaw

Sir William Bradshaw is a noted doctor in London. His diagnostic skills are unparalleled. Bradshaw is the specialist called in to help Septimus with his unknown problems.

Elizabeth Dalloway

Elizabeth Dalloway is the studious teenage daughter of Clarissa and Richard Dalloway.

Miss Kilman

Miss Kilman, a born again Christian, is Elizabeth Dalloway's tutor. Miss Kilman loves Elizabeth but loathes and therefore avoid, Clarissa.

Dr. Holmes

Dr. Holmes is the doctor that first treated Septimus Warren Smith. Holmes is the one present when Septimus commits suicide.

Objects/Places

Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace is the home to the King and Queen of England. Located in Westminster, it is the official home for the Royals although they only spend part of the year in residence. It is often used for state dinners, grand parties, and other official celebrations and events.

Buckingham Palace becomes the focus of the story when several people, including Clarissa, see a stately car pull up on the street and park. The window shade is drawn so no one can be sure who is inside. While some think it is the Prime Minister, others are convinced it is the King, Queen, or Prince of Wales.

It is the middle of June so the Royals have come to Buckingham Palace where they will stay for the balance of the summer. Many people gather to watch the arrival of the Royals. Some are enthralled by the arrival of the King and Queen while others take the opportunity to protest, swear and throw things onto the street to show the desperate state of the country. The people gather in droves on the outskirts of the Palace. Some talk about seeing this or that Royal in town. People seem to be much more interested in the notoriety of the Royals rather than their politics.

London, England

London, England is the main setting in the story. Except for several references to the countryside or to Burma/India, the entire story takes place in London.

London in the 1920s is much different than it was during the War. Peter Walsh seems to notice it the most, having just returned from five years in India. People are more open in their activities and certainly much less formal. The people do things now that would have been unheard of before the War, such as the way they dress, how they greet one another, and behave in public. Peter mourns the mounting loss of propriety in the great city.

The main part of the story takes place in Westminster, an upscale part of the city. Buckingham Palace is located in this section of the city as are the homes of the majority of the characters.

London is also the site of the House of Parliament, where Richard Dalloway works. It is the center for lawmaking and policy, so there is always some political discussion going on, at which Richard is typically the center.

The characters love London for all its good and bad qualities.

Some regions of London mentioned are: Picadilly, Victoria Street, Bond Streets, the Strand, the Stroud, St. James' Park, Regent's Park, Whitehall, Haymarket Street, Fleet Street, Buckingham Palace, and Parliament.

Westminster

Westminster is the upscale section of London that houses the Dalloway home, Lady Bruton's estate, Buckingham Palace, and Parliament.

The Dalloway Home

The Dalloway Home is the residence of Clarissa, Richard and Elizabeth Dalloway. The house is filled with unique and expensive treasures and also kept just so to keep up appearances.

Lady Bruton's Estate

Lady Bruton's estate is the site of many famous luncheons attended by notable people.

Bourton

Bourton is the name of Clarissa's childhood home.

India

India is the country to which Peter Walsh fled and spent the next five years of his life.

The Houses of Parliament

The Houses of Parliament are the sites in which Richard Dalloway works.

Fleet Street

Fleet Street is one of the famous streets in the city. Elizabeth is fascinated with the goings on in the area.

Regent's Park

Regent's Park is a famous site in London. Many of the characters spend time there and also cross paths with one another.

Themes

Keeping up Appearances

Clarissa Dalloway is the main character in the story. She is in her mid-fifties and married to Lord Richard Dalloway, a politician. As a politician's wife, it is of the utmost importance that Clarissa's life consists mostly of being the perfect and appropriate politician's wife. This means shopping for the right clothes and furnishings, keeping up her home with the labor being supplied by servants, ensuring that Elizabeth receives a good education, and entertaining distinguished and notable guests. It also includes fretting that Elizabeth does not like pretty things like her mother or care about the things women of society are supposed to embrace and enjoy.

Although the Dalloways have servants, Clarissa works hard to ensure that the house is just so. It must be filled with nice and unusual things; things that make a house homey while still being a showpiece. Clothes must be perfect as are physical appearances. As Clarissa plans for the party, it is clear how much care she puts into her outward appearance, as well as the appearance of her home and family.

Keeping up appearances also deals with attending the right social functions with the right people and entertaining those people in her home. Even if a certain person is not well liked, s/he is welcome if s/he is important enough. It is this behavior that has turned Miss Kilman against Clarissa.

Criticism

Criticism affects Clarissa deeply. Ever since Clarissa was a young girl, someone was always criticizing her, including her family. Peter is the worst offender, constantly criticizing and picking apart absolutely everything Clarissa does and says. Later in life Peter has the slight realization that he is critical of Clarissa. In Peter's mind, he is simply trying to figure out what Clarissa is about, to probe into her mind and understand her thoughts and actions, all of which seem foreign to him. In Clarissa's mind, however, Peter's criticisms cut her to the bone and make her doubt everything she says and does. It also causes her to overreact in many situations.

Because of this criticism Clarissa blocks herself off from certain situations. She often pulls inside herself and wonders why she said or did this or that thing that most likely made her seem foolish, stupid or graceless. This is something that only Clarissa can overcome.

Being a perfectionist is difficult for Clarissa. Many people think that she spends too much time on unimportant things but perhaps it is better to be really good at something, like entertaining, rather than being only mediocre and therefore unacceptable in other ways.

As one that has often been so heavily criticized, Clarissa often picks apart the behavior and social status of others. The one to point this out as being troublesome is Lady Bruton, who objects to seeing anyone in anything but a positive light.

Relationships

Relationships are addressed in many different ways in the story. First is the relationship between Clarissa and Richard Dalloway. The marriage seems solid and the couple complements one another nicely. It almost seems like a marriage of convenience as Richard is a politician, although there is love.

Lucrezia and Septimus Warren Smith were once madly in love. Rezia returned to England with Septimus from her native Italy, suggesting her commitment to her husband. When Septimus becomes ill, one can see the severing of the relationship until the depth of the problem is realized. Then Rezia is determined to stay by the man she loves although that man is almost unrecognizable.

The relationship between Clarissa and Sally is intricate. Best friends till the end, many years can pass and there will be no real time lost in this relationship. Clarissa believes that she was in love with Sally. There is no blatant mention of intimacy between the two but there is clearly love. The same situation is mirrored in the relationship between Miss Kilman and Elizabeth, although Elizabeth is unaware except when it becomes uncomfortable.

Lastly, the relationship between Peter and Clarissa seems to be complicated as they do not seem to belong together but are discontented when they are apart.

Style

Point of View

The point of view employed in "Mrs. Dalloway" is the third person and omniscient. This choice is particularly accurate when setting and time period are of great significance to the story. Third person allows Woolf to give the reader great insight into the sights and sounds encountered on the journey and to develop a sense of personality and vision regarding each character. This type of writing is what made Woolf famous.

Since many of the facts in the book are historically accurate, it is even more important to impart them as such even if they are woven into the story. This creates a true to life feel about the Londoners and their journey as well as the overall feel of what it was like to experience the drastic changes that began to come about after the end of World War I.

Additionally, it allows the reader to get insight into things that may not have been seen and heard by Clarissa Dalloway or the others, to learn about the story through various sets of eyes and to experience the journeys of the characters like Richard, Peter, Sally, Lady Bruton, and the others. It also allows the reader to get a clear view of the situation involving Rezia and Septimus Warren Smith.

The point of view also allows the reader to experience and understand the vast difference in beliefs, systems, politics, and views on society.

Setting

London, England is the main setting in the story. Except for several references to the countryside or to Burma/India, the entire story takes place in London.

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Language and Meaning

"Mrs. Dalloway" takes place in the mid-1920s and the language is used in such a way to reflect the time period. As the book takes place in England for the most part, the Queen's English is the language of preference. Although some of the characters are bilingual, there is little to no foreign phrasing used. Even when Rezia talks about learning English, there are no difficult references to the language. It is fortunate that the reader is not expected to adopt new languages as easily as the main character.

In general, the language is quite easy to understand. It is not old English which tends to be overly proper and flowery. In fact, much of the language is similar to today's English, especially the Queen's English.

There are slight differences in the tone used by someone of Clarissa Dalloway's class, however. This basically means that the language is slightly more sophisticated than the average person.

The characters use many expressions that are not necessarily explained, although the meaning is usually clear through the use of supporting text. There are also many references to events of the day.

Over all, the language and meaning in "Mrs. Dalloway" is not laborious and lends an air of reality and flavor.

Structure

"Mrs. Dalloway" by Virginia Woolf is a novel consisting of 219 pages. There are no chapters or breaks in the text which makes it more like prose than an actual novel. Woolf is known for her literary works and elaborate descriptions. It is clear by the structure that this is in fact Virginia Woolf's world.

The book begins with a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, the woman that will become the central character in the book. The reader learns right away that Clarissa is a fifty-five year old woman with many flights of fancy and thoughts and actions that do seem frivolous to others.

The book slides from one topic and/or one character to the next. Woolf often ties them together in some way, such as the fact that both characters, although unknown to each other, may be walking in Regent's Park on the same afternoon. Because there are no chapters or breaks in the text whatsoever, the reader is sometimes confused as to which character is being referenced; which character is experiencing which scene. It is worked out eventually. The result is the feeling of prose rather than traditional fiction.

The story of Rezia and Septimus ends with Septimus' death. There is no climax or denouement to the story. It simply ends with Peter acknowledging that, for better or worse, Clarissa is always important and right in front of him.

Historical Context

The New Modern Era

The nineteenth century ushered in developments that profoundly changed European society. Mercantilism and industrialism created a powerful new class. The cultural, political and economic might of this new class, the bourgeoisie or middleclass, soon overtook that of the aristocratic classes that had controlled nations and empires before. The spread of democracy and workers' rights movements also characterized the nineteenth century. It was not until after World War I (1914-1918), however, that a deep sense of how extremely and permanently European society had changed prevailed.

Mrs. Dalloway registers this sense of the end of an era. Clarissa's Aunt Parry, the aged relic who makes an appearance at Clarissa's party, represents this decline and this ending of an old way of life. The old woman likes to remember her days in Burma, a time and place suggestive of the height of British imperialism and colonialism. But, as Lady Bruton's distressed comment about the situation in India makes clear, the old days of paternalistic European colonialism are over. India and other colonies that used to be comfortable homes for colonials like Clarissa's aunt are now uncomfortable places where the beginnings of serious battles for independence are occurring.

Lady Bruton also mentions the Labour Party's ascendancy. (This new party gained a parliamentary majority in England in 1924, the year before *Mrs. Dalloway* was published.) This detail indicates how the England of this time had become radically modern in its move to a fuller social democracy, the political system that still characterizes most modern nations today, including the United States. The Labour Party's name indicates its representation of rule by the people, for the people, as opposed to rule by an aristocracy or an oligarchic class.

Elizabeth Dalloway, a young woman considering a career, is also an indicator of change, as entering the working world was a social possibility not available to women before this time.

WWI

WWI bears comparison with the Vietnam War. Like this more recent war, it is remembered as a war that many thought should have been avoided and that traumatized its soldiers. It was an imperial war in two senses. First, it was an attempt to limit the European encroachments of Prussian imperial rule and power. Second, it was partially provoked by border skirmishes among European nations on the African continent (European nations had begun colonizing African territories in the late nineteenth century). It was a power struggle pertaining to traditional European ruling classes and had very little to do with the everyday concerns and struggles of most European citizens.

What was shocking about the war was how long it dragged on and how many casualties it produced. (It lasted four years and millions of young men died or were terribly wounded.) The style of fighting developed in this war was trench warfare. In trench warfare, soldiers dig deep ditches from which they shoot at the enemy. When given the order to charge, they climb out of these trenches and meet the enemy head-on. These cramped, claustrophobic trenches were breeding grounds for disease, as they were muddy and wet from frequent rainfall. Soldiers felt that the trenches were as much ready-made earthly graves as they were protection from enemy fire. Also, poison gas (mustard gas) was used during WWI, and soldiers caught by the fumes without gas masks died or suffered horribly.

Enemy soldiers often formed friendships during cease-fire periods in the space of no man's land between opposing trench lines. Soldiers on both sides felt strongly that their real enemies were not each other, but the officers, politicians and generals who were running the war. The carnage, mutilation, and terror of this badly managed war resulted in a host of traumatized war veterans. This trauma was given the name "shell shock" in the years following the war. Septimus Warren Smith, who was a brave soldier, but who ends up a suicidal, ruined man, indicates Woolf's condemnation of this unfortunate war.

Critical Overview

All of Woolf's publications, fictional and non-fictional alike, have received a great deal of critical attention. A bibliography of criticism on Woolf would be a very hefty book in its own right, as her work has been the subject of intense study since she began writing, and it is still a major topic today. Considered equal to the likes of Shakespeare, James Joyce, and Charlotte Brontë, Virginia Woolf is indisputably one of the English language's greatest literary voices.

Major topics in the criticism on *Mrs. Dalloway* are the significance of Clarissa's party as the culminating event of the book, and Peter Walsh's and others' criticism of her parties. At one point in the novel, Clarissa is plagued by a bad feeling. With some thought, she arrives at the source of her anxiety: "Her parties! That was it! Her parties! Both of them [Peter and Richard] criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her unjustly for her parties. That was it! That was it!" She goes on to think: "Well, how was she going to defend herself?"

Critics have defended Clarissa amply by theorizing the significance of the opposition of Richard, parliamentarian and politician, and the seemingly apolitical, spoilt Clarissa, giver of parties and lover of beauty. For Suzette A. Henke, in "*Mrs. Dalloway:* the Communion of Saints," Clarissa's party is akin to a sacred mass, "a ritual culminating in sacred communion." In the opinion of Jeremy Hawthorn, in *Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway": A Study in Alienation,* the party "is not just Clarissa's gift, it is the occasion for communal giving . . . which will recharge the participants' social sense and . . . allow them temporarily to escape from their alienated selves."

Other critics, along these lines, suggest Woolf's book argues that politicians like Richard would not be so busy cleaning up the messes of the world if people were brought up to love harmony, communication, community, and beauty before all other things. It is not, then, that *Mrs. Dalloway* is an apolitical or anti-political novel, these critics argue, but rather that its politics are radically different from the norm□the book advances a politic of beauty and community, as it were.

Many feminist critics suggest that this opposition of political styles is a gender issue. To these critics, it seems that Woolf understands that traditional women's work (mothering children, maintaining family bonds) emphasizes social bonding over competition. Women, therefore, and books like *Mrs. Dalloway,* have important lessons for society at large, and suggest how it might function more smoothly.

Related to considerations about the significance of Clarissa's parties are estimations about the novel's connection to contemporaneous social and political events. Until perhaps the last twenty years of Woolf criticism, a prevailing view was that Woolf was not at all interested in the "real world." The novelist E. M. Forster, Woolf's famous contemporary, stated in his book *Virginia Woolf* that "improving the world she [Woolf] would not consider" was not her intention. Yet, as other critics point out, such an opinion does not hold up when the author's own diary records that the novel's purpose was "to

criticise the social system, & show it at work, at its most intense." (This entry concerning *Mrs. Dalloway* can be found in Vol. II of *The Diary of Virginia Woolf.*)

Critics who examine this aspect of the novel discuss Woolf's subtle, if not wholesale, indictment of the outdated and overly conservative attitudes of Richard, Lady Bruton, and Hugh, and argue that the suffering of Septimus is to be understood as the result of such problematic views and policies. The prevailing attitude today concerning the book's politics, and Woolf's social views in general, is expressed succinctly by Suzette A. Henke (in the article previously cited): "All of Virginia Woolf's major novels suggest an intellectual commitment to feminist, pacifist, and socialist principles."

Another topic in the criticism of *Mrs. Dalloway* is an examination of Septimus and Clarissa as problems in psychology and mental health. Knowing that Woolf herself suffered bouts of mental disease, they find these characters' portraits a wealth of information. Another significant body of criticism focuses on questions of sexuality in the novel, considering, for example, Clarissa's love for Sally Seton. Some critics suggest that Clarissa's extreme feelings of isolation are to be understood partly as the result of a deleteriously suppressed homosexuality. In "Clarissa Dalloway's Respectable Suicide," Emily Jensen expresses this view: "No simple girlhood crush, Clarissa's love for Sally Seton is a profound reality that permeates her adult life." This critic goes on to say that Clarissa's suppression of this love is a sort of suicide, a death in life, "on a par with Septimus Smith's more obvious suicide." Jensen approaches Septimus as Clarissa's double, that is, as a character who aids the reader in arriving at a fuller understanding of Clarissa. Jensen's essay, in this way, intersects with yet another significant set of inquiries into the novel, which considers the book's clusters of characters, especially the clustering or doubling of Septimus and Clarissa.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico teaches English at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. In this essay, she examines the question of plot in Virginia Woolf's novel.

Mrs. Dalloway is a work of literature that can be classified as narrative fiction. That is, it tells a story, or a narrative, that is fictional, or made-up. Novels and short stories are narrative fictions usually structured by a plot. But *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel without a plot. This essay examines what this means and why the author might have chosen to eschew this typical narrative convention.

In *Aspects of the Novel,* Woolf's contemporary, E. M. Forster, explains the difference between story and plot in the following way:

> A plot [like a story] is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king dies and then the queen died," is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.

A plot, then, establishes causal relationships between characters, or between characters and events. Moreover, for a novel to be said to have a plot, this series of interconnected events must unify the entire story or determine most of its major happenings. To relate the story of a novel is simply to relate events and situations as they happen, page by page, in a book; to relate the plot involves capturing the reasons why the things that happen happen. While *Mrs. Dalloway* certainly establishes causal relationships between characters and events, the novel cannot be said to have a plot because a network of causality does not unify the entire book.

On the contrary, the book takes great trouble to establish how it is different, in this respect, from most novels. Chance and coincidence, instead of purposeful interconnection, structure the book. Peter Walsh, a very important character, arrives by chance at Clarissa's on the day of her party. Sally Seton, another important character, arrives at Clarissa's party unexpectedly and also by chance. Septimus Warren Smith is also a major character in the book who is only tangentially related to the other major characters. The connection of Septimus to the other characters is determined by chance and locale, not by any social connections these characters have in common. Septimus and Clarissa pass each other by chance, as both are on Bond Street at the same time. Septimus and Peter Walsh also pass each other by chance, just outside Regent's Park, neither knowing that the other exists. Indeed, it is the single day, the Wednesday in June 1923, that unifies the book, and nothing else.

Plots make what happen in a novel seem natural and inevitable. But plots are really just constructed by authors, and so the events depicted in novels are not inevitable at all. Woolf's plotless book of chance and coincidence plays on the way that plot is a series of

"coincidences" made to look like naturally or casually connected events by the careful work of a controlling author.

Most stories that are written and read have plots. The writer makes certain decisions about characters (their personalities and qualities), and about characters' relations to other characters or to social forces and events. The author then comes up with a plot built upon the likely responses and actions of character types in relation to other character types or in relation to social happenings. The author, in this way, feels that it is possible and desirable to predict how certain types of people will think and behave. The author also feels that certain social forces are describable and likely to have certain predictable effects on certain types of persons. The author who settles on a plot, then, is confident that he or she knows a great deal about human nature and about how the world works.

This confidence about personality type, social type, and how the world works was never more developed than in the novels of the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. Typical to these novels is a narrator who tells the reader all about the particular character□his or her thoughts and desires, his or weaknesses and strengths. These narrators also explain why a character acts the way he or she does. Authors, through their narrators, showed themselves to be experts□experts in psychology and sociology. In fact, it is no surprise that the academic sciences of sociology and psychology arose around the turn of the century; people and their lives were, quite literally, becoming sciences. Woolf discusses this science of writing, or this novelistic science of psychological and social knowledge in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown."

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" introduces a fictional character, a Mrs. Brown (who is riding in a railway carriage), and then shows how the various well-known and popular writers who immediately preceded Woolf would have presented her in their fiction. These major novelists she terms Edwardians, as King Edward was then the king of England. The writers in question are H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy.

Since Mrs. Brown is a character who appears to be in straightened circumstances and is most likely not particularly well-educated, Woolf parodies Wells' style in the following way:

> Seizing upon . . . the unsatisfactory condition of our primary schools with a rapidity to which I can do no justice, Mr. Wells would instantly project . . . a vision of a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous and gallant world where . . . these fusty old women do not exist.

Her criticism of Wells, then, is that he is a utopian, a writer not so much interested in presenting the intricacies and mysteries of character and personality, but rather more interested in expounding his theories and views about how society can be perfected. Galsworthy, Woolf asserts, would no sooner introduce such a character than launch into an authorial tirade "[b]urning with indignation, stuffed with information, [and] arraigning

civilization." Again, the intricacies and instabilities of individual characters are left behind, and the author's views about the world and about certain typical character types are expounded at length instead. What Bennett would do, says Woolf, is bury this character under a mountain of descriptive details□what she is wearing, where she comes from, what the railway carriage she is riding in looks like, and so forth. Once again, left behind would be any understanding of the character's complexities.

Only the new Georgian writers such as herself, says Woolf, or such as James Joyce or D. H. Lawrence, have returned literature to its proper domain, where inquiry and delicacy are as important as the author's views about what can and should be done to ameliorate the condition of society. (She terms herself and her contemporaries Georgians because King George succeeded King Edward in 1910.)

Given Woolf's sense of the overweening confidence and all-knowing attitude of the writers that preceded her, her decision to write a novel without a plot can be understood. To eschew or avoid plot, within this historical and intellectual context, means to suggest that an all-knowing stance is not always productive. Since deciding on a plot means having definitive views about social types and social forces, writing a plotless novel suggests that perhaps it is better, at times, to be a person who approaches the world as a questioner, as one seeking knowledge and enlightenment, as opposed to one who already knows everything or who has answers to solve every social problem.

Since the reader of a novel tends to intellectually identify with the stance of the narrator, the reader of one of Bennett's novels, for example, is made into an all-knowing, god-like figure. The reader, like the narrator, is in a position of knowing more than any character and of having full understanding of how the world works. The reader of a novel without a plot, in contrast, is put into the position of one who must explore and question the relationship between things. Not everything is answered for this other reader; not everything is known. The reader of a more experimental, plotless novel is a reader who is encouraged to question reality, to not assume full knowledge. This other reader is one who is asked to think and explore, as opposed to simply receive knowledge and apply it; this reader is encouraged to ask why things are the way they are and how they might be changed, as opposed to simply having answers and ideas presented to him or her on a platter.

Writers such as Woolf believed that psychological and social knowledge in novels was becoming too pat, that character and plot were becoming predictable, mimicking the latest treatise written by a politician, a sociologist, or a psychologist. There are deeper reasons, however, to turn away from an all-knowing, scientific approach to character and plot. At issue was not simply remembering to be a thinker and explorer, but also the question of whether humankind was in control to the extent it was convinced it was. To know social types and how the world works means to be in control of the world. But was humankind in such full control?

If humankind wasn't in such full control, then the need to think hard about social problems was still a priority, and feelings of over-confidence about the state of knowledge were a danger. For instance, Europeans of the nineteenth century believed

in progress: humankind was inventing machines and building institutions and cities that were making life on earth better for all. But, asked writers like Woolf, was humankind really progressing? Was the story or plot of progress true to reality? Was scientific knowledge really explaining and controlling the world in beneficial and predictable ways? Things changed, to be sure, but was humankind progressing morally, in the way that really mattered? Were more people truly better off than before? In fact, the industrial revolution, with all of its machines, may have made work easier and faster, but a new class of impoverished factory workers merely had replaced a propertyless agricultural peasantry. Technology brought airplanes and railroads, but it also made war that much more efficiently destructive.

Not all writers or artists contemporaneous to Woolf who were making interventions into typical artistic forms thought the same way. Many of them celebrated technological advances. What most agreed upon, however, was the need to pause and take stock of science's progress, to make sure that it produced the benefits promised, and not a new type of misery. Thus, to refuse plot is to refuse the typical stories of the time, the typical stories people were telling themselves about the world and progress. Since people make sense of the world by telling stories about the past and the present and about how things work, to refuse plot is to intervene into social narrative and insist that the old stories or the old ways of explaining social life need adjustment or examination.

By not constructing a plot, Woolf offers her readers the opportunity to make up a new story about social life. Readers surprised at such a startling departure from typical novelistic form are invited to ask why there is no plot, what it means when an author decides to be different. If a reader is not told how everything in a novel is tied together, it is up to him or her to do the work. In this way, the reader of *Mrs. Dalloway* can figure out for himor herself why things are the way they are, or how things might have been, or could be, different.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, Critical Essay on *Mrs. Dalloway,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following early negative review of Mrs. Dalloway, *Bennett identifies Woolf as the leader of a new school in writing and criticizes her work for lacking vitality.*

My remarks last week about the younger novelists have aroused some complaint, and it has been said to be odd that I, for years the champion of the young, should turn and rend them. I will therefore proceed further. What I have already written is nothing compared to what I will now write.

The real champion of the younger school is Mrs Virginia Woolf. She is almost a senior; but she was the inventor, years ago, of a half-new technique, and she alone, so far as I know, came forward and attacked the old. She has written a small book about me, which through a culpable neglect I have not read. I do, however, remember an article of hers in which she asserted that I and my kind could not create character. This was in answer to an article of mine in which I said that the sound drawing of character was the foundation of good fiction, and in which incidentally I gave my opinion that Mrs Woolf and her kind could not create character.

I have read two and a half of Mrs Woolf's books. First, *The Common Reader,* which is an agreeable collection of elegant essays on literary subjects. Second, *Jacob's Room,* which I achieved with great difficulty. Third, *Mrs Dalloway,* which beat me. I could not finish it, because I could not discover what it was really about, what was its direction, and what Mrs Woolf intended to demonstrate by it.

To express myself differently, I failed to discern what was its moral basis. As regards character- drawing, Mrs Woolf (in my opinion) told us ten thousand things about Mrs Dalloway, but did not show us Mrs Dalloway. I got from the novel no coherent picture of Mrs Dalloway. Nor could I see much trace of construction, or ordered movement towards a climax, in either *Jacob's Room* or *Mrs Dalloway.* Further, I thought that both books seriously lacked vitality.

These three defects, I maintain, are the characteristic defects of the new school of which Mrs Woolf is the leader. The people in them do not sufficiently live, and hence they cannot claim our sympathy or even our hatred: they leave us indifferent. Logical construction is absent; concentration on the theme (if any) is absent; the interest is dissipated; material is wantonly or clumsily wasted, instead of being employed economically as in the great masterpieces. Problems are neither clearly stated nor clearly solved.

The new practitioners have simply returned to the facile go-as-you-please methods of the eighteenth century, ignoring the important discoveries and innovations of Balzac and later novelists. How different is the new school of fiction from the new school of painting, with its intense regard for logical design!

Lastly, there is absence of vital inspiration. Some novelists appear to have no zest; they loll through their work as though the were taking a stroll in the Park. I admit that I may be wrong on the second count; I may be blind to evidences of a design which is too subtle for my perception. But I do not think that I can be wrong on the first and third counts.

And I admit that some of the younger school write very well. In the novels of Mrs Woolf some brief passages are so exquisitely done that nothing could be done better. But to be fine for a few minutes is not enough. The chief proof of first-rateness is sustained power.

Source: Arnold Bennett, "Another Criticism of the New School," 1925, reprint, in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage,* edited by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, pp. 189-90.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Johnson offers an overview of Mrs. Dalloway, *focusing on its theme of insanity.*

In her . . . novel, *Mrs. Dalloway,* [Woolf] continues to work out her problems of theme and form along the lines laid out first in the short stories and *Jacob's Room.* Thus most of the "ideas" in *Mrs. Dalloway* are carried over from *Jacob's Room,* though she adds the major theme of insanity. But that is also simply a development of two ideas in the preceding novel: (1) that there must be a positive (loving) connection between the inner and outer life; and (2) that institutional power is the expression of a negative (unloving) connection, Jacob's death being attributed to war, a manifestation of institutional mania for power over individuals.

Millions of Jacobs died in 1914-18, Woolf insists, because of this mania in high places. Now, in *Mrs. Dalloway,* Virginia Woolf shows us another victim□Septimus Warren Smith, who is clinically insane as a result of four years in combat. Smith falls into the hands of two medical practitioners whose energies are directed toward dominating their patient instead of healing him.

Clarissa Dalloway, too, is passing through a mental crisis, precipitated partly by a recent severe illness. During the single day in which the events of *Mrs. Dalloway* take place, the stories of these two□Clarissa and Septimus□are intertwined, though they never meet. Clarissa moves away from isolation toward an acceptance of life in all its puzzling complexity; Septimus moves ever deeper into isolation and finally suicide.

The narrative present of *Mrs. Dalloway* spans most of a bright, warm June day in London some five years after the war of 1914-18. But the tunneling into the past (Virginia Woolf's expression) goes back for thirty years. Readers familiar with *The Voyage Out,* in which the Dalloways appear briefly, will find no mention of that part of their past in this novel. All events, both past and present, build toward Clarissa's dinner party, when they are brought together in new relationships. The following summarizes briefly the major characters and action leading up to the party.

Mrs. Dalloway leaves her house in Westminster to buy flowers. On the way, she meets an old acquaintance, Hugh Whitbread, a functionary in the royal household. Later she observes a royal car passing through the streets and an airplane skywriting. Septimus Smith, a man in his early twenties, is seated on a bench in Regent's Park with his Italian wife Lucrezia (Rezia). He has spent four years in the war and is now mentally ill. He sees the skywriting and thinks that "they" are trying to get messages to him from the dead. Dr. Holmes, a general practitioner, has advised Mrs. Smith to get her husband interested in "real" things. But they are now on their way to see a specialist, Sir William Bradshaw.

Peter Walsh, in love with Clarissa thirty years ago, leaves the Dalloway house, where he has talked to Clarissa for the first time in many years, and walks toward Regent's

Park. He follows a woman, out of sexual fantasy, until she disappears into a house. In the park, he naps, sitting on a bench. Leaving the park, he passes Septimus and Rezia and outside encounters a street singer, an old woman, singing a love song.

Richard Dalloway, Clarissa's husband, Member of Parliament, is at Lady Bruton's for lunch. She is a prominent society hostess who likes being involved with government affairs and moving masses of people around in various projects of her invention. Hugh Whitbread, Clarissa's old friend, is also a guest. Lady Bruton wants these two men, both involved in government, to help her with one of her projects.

Septimus and Lucrezia keep their appointment with Sir William, who sees that the case is serious and advises Lucrezia to place her husband in a sanatorium. By now, Septimus identifies both doctors as his special persecutors. Both are, in fact, more interested in exercising power than in treating individuals.

Elizabeth Dalloway, Clarissa's daughter, about eighteen, leaves the Dalloway house for an afternoon with Miss Kilman, a woman of extraordinary unattractiveness. She is a religious zealot and has been proselytizing Elizabeth. Clarissa also fears that there is an unhealthy sexual relationship developing between the two. But as they take tea, Miss Kilman loses her hold on the girl. Elizabeth leaves the tea shop alone, boards a bus, and rides through London on a kind of voyage of independence, from which she returns "calm and competent."

Septimus and Rezia are in their sitting room. She is making hats, he going through the notes he has made of messages from the dead: "do not cut down trees; Universal love; the meaning of the world." Dr. Holmes chooses this moment to call Dr. Holmes who "seemed to stand for something horrible to him. 'Human nature' he called him." As Holmes forces his way past Rezia into the room, Septimus leaps to his death. The novel concludes with the long section about the Dalloway party that evening, with the horror of Septimus's death offset by Clarissa's renewed vitality.

As Clarissa goes through the hours before her dinner party, she is besieged by memories of the past stirring up doubts about her marriage to a man caught up in the endless round of politics; doubts about her daughter; and, most of all, doubts about herself. For she has just recovered from an illness, and to walk out into the bright June day is for her like the beginning of a new life except for memories and the demands of the future that lie heavy upon her.

What she remembers is "scene after scene at Bourton," the country house where she grew to womanhood. Thirty years ago at Bourton, Clarissa and Peter Walsh had been much together. Clarissa came to feel that Peter's insistence on sharing everything, and his critical assessments, were finally intolerable, and she broke off their relationship. Yet there had been something vital between them, and in the years afterward Clarissa would never be certain she did not still love him.

Clarissa was also drawn to the energetic, attractive Sally Seton, who had shocked old Mrs. Parry at Bourton by running naked down the hall to the bathroom. Clarissa's

memories of Sally are still, after thirty years, full and rich—how Sally had given her a flower and kissed her on the mouth just before Peter came upon them at the fountain one evening. The emotionally charged involvements with Peter and Sally were factors in Clarissa's decision to marry the steadier Richard Dalloway. And this decision, too, she believes thirty years later, had been a wise one. Peter would have destroyed her with his constant intrusions and critical remarks; and Sally would have dominated her.

These were Clarissa's memories as she went about preparing for her party that night, not just of events and relationships, but also a recollection of the atmosphere in which they occurred: the excited conversations, the laughter, the intuitive awareness of cross-purposes. These had been signs of life intensely felt, and she remembers how intense they had been.

But memory is inferior to present experience. What Clarissa loves now, she is certain, is before her eyes in the bright June morning: trees, and mothers with babies, the activity in nearby streets, the park itself appearing to lift its leaves "brilliantly, on waves of divine vitality." Clarissa sees this creative energy flowing from nature and shaping the present moment, the vital force of which is frequently symbolized by trees.

But the most attractive aspect of vitality appears in humans going about their business and their play—the "conduct of daily life" described in *Jacob's Room* as better than "the pageant of armies drawn out in battle array." A vision similar to that observed by Jacob, and identical in meaning, is experienced by Elizabeth when she cuts loose from Miss Kilman and in her excitement sets out to explore the city. She likes the uproar of the streets; she seems to hear the blare of trumpets, as if the crowds are marching to military music. The noise of the people in the streets is a "voice, pouring endlessly." This would carry them along. There is a Dickensian delight in movement and sounds in the description of Elizabeth's recommitment to life on her own, echoed by what Peter Walsh encounters on the warm June evening as he walks toward Clarissa's house—people opening doors, entering motor cars, rushing along the streets.

Despite these manifestations of human energy in masses, Woolf establishes the vital quality of life most strikingly in two solitary old women—one the street singer heard by Peter Walsh, the other the occupant of a room across the way from Clarissa's house. The old street singer's song at first is hardly intelligible; certainly she is no picture of vitality— nearly blind, and in rags. Her song, however, celebrates the invincible power of love, how love had lasted a million years, bubbling up like an ancient spring spouting from the earth, greening things, fertilizing.

> Still remembering how once in some primeval May
> she had walked with her lover, this rusty pump, this
> battered old woman . . . would still be there in ten
> million years . . . the passing generations—the pavement
> was crowded with bustling middle class people
> —vanished like leaves, to be trodden under, to be
> soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal
> spring.

The whole passage about the street singer is one of those Woolf developed more through the devices of poetry than of prose. Its effect depends on the persuasiveness of the imagery to transform the reader's feeling for the old woman, whether pity or revulsion, into wonder and admiration. A tree without leaves, she is still an instrument from which the wind of creative energy elicits a song: "Cheerfully, almost gaily, the invincible thread of sound wound up into the air, like the smoke from a cottage chimney." It is an evocative piece of writing, persuasive indeed□but not convincing. The metaphors of the rusty pump and the cottage are obtrusive. The reader sees what they are meant to do and feels the poetry of them, but with reservation.

The second incident involving an old woman occurs in the course of the party at Dalloway's house. In developing the significance of this scene, Woolf employs a more successful technique. She does not attempt to move the reader by poetic statement to believe that the old woman represents life without despair. The scene is depicted in a matterof- fact way. As Clarissa watches an old woman in her room across the street preparing for bed, there are none of the verbal associations with love, as in the street singer's song, to make their frank appeal to the reader's emotions. Yet the significance of what Clarissa sees, though tentative even in her mind, is sufficient to offset the despair that has been rising in her.

This episode occurs after Clarissa hears at the party about the young man (Septimus) who has killed himself. Thinking about his suicide, Clarissa feels that the disaster, the disgrace of Septimus, is hers. Guilt floods her: "She had schemed; she had pilfered." But, thinking that she doesn't deserve to be happy, nevertheless she is. Now she rejects the triumphs of youth, and has committed herself wholly to the process of living□"creating it every moment afresh."

On a previous occasion, when Clarissa had been sorting out her thoughts about the religious zealot Miss Kilman, she had seen the old woman climb the stairs to her room, alone, as if self-contained in her life. To Clarissa there had been something solemn in it. But with Miss Kilman and Peter Walsh on her mind□those two proselytizers of religion and "love"□she had thought of the old woman in connection with that kind of love and religion that can destroy the privacy of the soul the old woman seemed to have. The "supreme mystery" was this: "here was one room; there was another. Did religion solve that, or love?"

Now at the party, as she watches the old woman again, seeing her move around, Clarissa is fascinated. Several things are coming together in Clarissa's mind□the idea of the privacy of the soul, and the mystery of the separation of human lives; these things joining with her awareness of the activities, the laughing and shouting, going on all around her at the party. Suddenly no longer in despair, she no longer pities herself, nor the young man who had killed himself. As the old lady's light goes out, Clarissa thinks of that whole house, dark now, with all this activity going on around it. Putting out the light was like dying. It did not stop the activity of living; the pageant of life went on.

Clarissa takes comfort in this train of thoughts because of her "theory," confided to Peter Walsh in the old days. They had been riding up Shaftesbury Avenue in a bus when she

felt herself everywhere □not "here, here, here," she said, tapping the back of the seat, "but everywhere." Her comfort in the relationship that she felt between the old woman across the way and the young man who killed himself derives from that part of her theory about the affinities between people and how one must seek out those who complete one: the "unseen part of us" might survive, "be recovered somehow attached to this person or that."

The line from Shakespeare, "Fear no more the heat of the sun," appearing several times, explains Clarissa's cryptic remark about the young man's suicide: "She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away." One need not fear the disasters of the physical life. Clarissa feels that if the young man had thrown his life away, she has caught it in hers. If the young man could complete his life in hers, then Clarissa could complete her life in others. It was a mystery□"here was one room; there was another" □but no longer a despairing mystery. This quality of excitement bubbling up from new-born vitality is what Peter Walsh recognizes in Clarissa at the book's conclusion: "What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said."

Virginia Woolf celebrated this ongoing vitality in many ways in her novels□welling up in love, at parties, and in the ordinary business of everyday life. She placed it in opposition to the mania of those in positions of power to control the course of events. In *Jacob's Room,* these were the men in clubs and cabinets. In *Mrs. Dalloway,* signs of power are everywhere: the royal coat of arms emblazoned on Hugh Whitbread's dispatch case; the automobile and a face "of the very greatest importance" glimpsed against its dove-gray interior; the ceremonial marching of troops; and the prime minister himself at the Dalloways' party.

Accompanying these symbols and panoply of institutional power, there is the pervasive sense of the damage done to human lives by the individual wielders of power: the waste of Hugh Whitbread's genuine qualities in the servilities of his position as a court functionary; the persistent meddling of Lady Bruton, utilizing her position in society to move people around as if they were pieces in a little game of her own. When Lady Bruton naps, we are informed, her arm assumes the position of a field marshal's holding his baton.

This malicious observation springs out of Woolf's indignation, but one of the measures of her skill as a novelist is the ability to discipline strong feelings into the lasting instrument of art: for instance, the subtle paralleling of the dove-gray car of Sir William Bradshaw to the royal car. Sir William, the psychiatrist who takes over Septimus Smith from Dr. Holmes, is another manifestation of the established order as malevolent. His sinister compulsion to dominate those who come within his control is linked through the case of Septimus to the political powers in Whitehall: it is "they" who provided the shambles of war in which his sanity was damaged, and it is Sir William who completes the job.

We are never allowed to forget the war: the painful picture of Lady Bexborough opening a bazaar with the message in hand of her son's death in combat; the company of

soldiers marching to a cenotaph; and through it all the presence of Septimus Smith, a shambling, broken figure, who signals institutional guilt whenever he appears.

Virginia Woolf exposes relentlessly the mania to dominate of people like Lady Bruton, Sir William, and Dr. Holmes. The clinical madness of Septimus is represented as a consequence in their manipulations□indirectly, as in the case of Lady Bruton's political and social schemes, and directly in the perverted "healing" of Bradshaw and Holmes.

Septimus is the victim of a war-induced neurosis. Having volunteered early in the war of 1914-18, he suffered for four years the frustration of his idealistic impulse to "save England for Shakespeare." Withstanding the successive traumas of combat, he is stricken by the survivor's guilt after his friend Evans is killed. Crippled within, he seeks out Lucrezia to marry her, with the instinctive knowledge that her health is what his sickness needs. She appears to him as the tree of life,

as if all her petals were about her. She was a flowering
tree; and through her branches looked out the
face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary
where she feared no one.

His instinct was right and she is good for him, but because she is inexperienced and a foreigner, she is not capable of protecting him against the malpractices, condoned by society, of such "healers" as Holmes and Sir William.

Sir William, a large distinguished-looking man, would not appear to be insane in any clinical sense. But he makes everyone profoundly uneasy in his presence. He is a self-made man, we discover, who has permitted himself to be shaped by the materialistic values that reward domination. In treating his patients he invoked all the forces of society to gain their submission. "Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up." In his compulsion to put people away, Woolf casts Sir William as an agent of death. For insanity, as she describes it, is isolation from people, from things, from all the stuff of life□ death, in short.

Sanity she identifies with life□the physical substance of it□women nursing babies, the blare of trumpets, legs moving energetically down the street. Even Richard Dalloway holding Clarissa's hand, though not the passionate moment of the kind he had imagined when he resolved to say I love you, is a moment of shared physical intimacy□it lives.

Peter Walsh, on the contrary, creating lurid fantasies around the woman he follows through the streets, is to a degree insane, to a degree dead, in that what he submits himself to is isolation: "All this one could never share□it smashed to atoms." The emptiness of Walsh's fantasy is like that of Katharine Hilbery's dream in *Night and Day*□her "magnanimous hero" riding his horse by the sea□ a waste of imaginative power.

Walsh is torn between wanting to share and wanting to isolate himself. His life had been a constant vacillation, chasing one woman, then another, interspersed with "work, work,

work." So that when in the end he is strongly moved by the vitality of Clarissa, it is not certain that this commitment is anything more than physical attraction or more than momentary. What is certain is that Clarissa has come through her own struggle against self-isolation and confirmed her rebirth into the health of shared existence.

In giving the "world of the sane and the insane side by side" (her primary objective in this novel), Virginia Woolf shows the sane reaching out to life□like Clarissa, recognizing in the old woman across the street someone whose life touches hers. Though her treatment of this idea is lyric, she does not attempt to screen the unpleasant or tragic with lyricism. Death is the dissonance that keeps her song complex and intriguing. In Clarissa, for instance, there is double awareness of mortality□ through her recent serious illness and through having witnessed in girlhood the death of her gifted sister, crushed by a falling tree. The tree, so often in Woolf's writing the image of persistent life, by this accident reinforces the ambiguity of existence □like the light of *Night and Day,* it contains a portion of its opposite.

Many circumstances in *Mrs. Dalloway,* including the terrifying medical experience of Septimus Smith, were drawn from Virginia Woolf's life. The original intention to have Clarissa kill herself □in the pattern of Woolf's own intermittent, despair□was rejected in favor of a "dark double" who would take that act upon himself. Creating Septimus Smith led directly to Clarissa's mystical theory of vicarious death and shared existence, saving the novel from a damaging imbalance on the side of darkness. Virginia Woolf's success in using her own madness as a subject for fiction, evidently provided the necessary confidence for attempting the equally delicate naterials of her next novel, *To the Lighthouse,* which concerned her unhappy childhood and the memories, still sensitive, of her parents.

Source: Manly Johnson, "*Mrs. Dalloway,*" in *Virginia Woolf,* Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973, pp. 52-63.

Quotes

"She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere." (pg. 9.)

"So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling to me" (pg. 22.)

"But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (pg. 34.)

"If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!" (pg. 50.)

"They had always this queer power of communicating without words" (pg. 66.)

"For himself, he was absurd. His demands upon Clarissa (he could see it now) were absurd" (pg. 69.)

"Everyone has friends who were killed in the War. Everyone gives up something with they marry. She had given up her home" (pg. 73.)

"Those five years - 1918 to 1923 - had been, he suspected, somehow very important" (pg. 79.)

"Anyhow there was no bitterness in her; none of that sense of moral virtue which is so repulsive in good women" (pg. 87.)

"But women, he thought, shitting his pocket-knife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men" (pg. 89.)

"So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?" (pg. 92.)

"Sir William never spoke of 'madness'; he called it not having a sense of proportion" (pg. 107.)

"She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer

nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his mind; wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up. But she heard nothing" (pg. 157.)

"The people we are most fond of are not good for us when we are ill" (pg. 165.)

Adaptations

Mrs. Dalloway was adapted into a film of the same name in 1997, directed by Marleen Gorris. It stars the venerated British actor Vanessa Redgrave as Clarissa Dalloway.

Topics for Further Study

Research shell shock in relation to WWI. How do treatments for war trauma today differ from those used then?

What was the role of women during WWI? How did women contribute to the war effort in Britain?

Compare and Contrast

1920s: In Britain, the Labour Party rises to power, women get the right to vote, and the first major wave of communication and travel technologies are incipient or, in some cases, widely established (radio, telephone, telegraph communications; automobile and airplane travel).

Today: International communications and connections have progressed to such an extent, due to computer technology and the Internet, that the term "globalization" is in common use. The modern world foreseen in the 1920s has definitively arrived.

1920s: Modernism, the set of artistic movements that try to express, through form and style, the cultural and social changes of a brand new century, is flourishing. The modernists profess internationalism.

Today: Art at the close of the twentieth century is defined by postmodernism. The name of this new set of movements suggests how its forms are both tied to modernism (post*modernism*), and in some ways defined against modernism (*post*modernism). Postmodernists examine and question globalization and transnationalism.

1920s: While the American colonies of Europe (i.e., the United States and the nations of South and Central America) have long since established themselves as independent nations, the twentieth century is characterized by nationalist and independence movements in Europe's remaining colonies (in Asia and Africa). These movements are not brought to a close until the 1960s.

Today: Colonies no longer exist; rather, a group of independent nations cover the globe.

What Do I Read Next?

To the Lighthouse (1927) was Woolf's next novel, after the success of *Mrs. Dalloway.* It concerns a large family spending a summer at the seaside, much like Woolf's own family did during her childhood.

Ulysses (1922), by James Joyce, is a challenging book. The title refers to the famous classical Greek story of a man's epic travels (those of Odysseus, also called Ulysses). The epic journey, it has been said, refers less to the main character's (Ulysses'/Leopold Bloom's) perambulations through Dublin and more to the journey the reader experiences as he or she reads through the extraordinary stylistic shifts that make up this modernist novel. Like *Mrs. Dalloway, Ulysses* takes place within a single day and characterizes a city as well as its characters.

The Hours (1998), by Michael Cunningham, is a recently published novel based on Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway.* It interweaves the lives of three women in three times: Virginia Woolf in 1923, a 1949 Woolf fan in Los Angeles, and a present day Clarissa, planning a party.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), by William Faulkner, is a novel whose stylistic beauty and experimentation represent an American modernism contemporaneous to the experiments of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce abroad.

Topics for Discussion

Examine the relationship between Peter and Clarissa. Do you think Peter still loves Clarissa? Do you think Clarissa still loves Peter? Is their relationship strained because of their past together? If Clarissa is upset by Peter, why does she always think about him? What do you think will happen between Peter and Clarissa?

Clarissa and Sally were best friends in their youth although they were markedly different. Compare and contrast Clarissa and Sally then and now.

Septimus Warren Smith is suffering from some unnamed illness. Dr. Holmes thinks it can be cured with bromide and some rest. Sir William thinks it is shell-shock. Septimus thinks he can see beyond anything available to other people and that he carries a great message. Explain Septimus' issues and your opinion on his illness.

List and explain at least three uses of foreshadowing in the story.

Discuss the awkward relationship between Clarissa and Elizabeth. Do the mother and daughter get along? What is Clarissa's opinion of Elizabeth's activities, interests and habits? Why is Miss Kilman in the picture? What is Elizabeth's opinion of Clarissa?

Examine Peter's self-sabotage. Do you think Clarissa's rejection caused him to marry the girl on the ship? Will Peter sabotage his relationship with Daisy? Why does Peter do things that he knows aren't right for him?

The book ends while the Dalloways are giving a party. What do you think will happen at the end of the evening? What do you think will happen with the characters in the next week, month, and year?

Further Study

Abel, Elizabeth, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis,* University of Chicago Press, 1989.

The brilliant chapter on *Mrs. Dalloway* from Abel's book examines the way in which Woolf's novel responds to and contests Freud's theories about women.

Daiches, David, *Virginia Woolf,* James Laughlin, 1942.

Daiches book gives an excellent, highly readable overview of Woolf's art and fictions.

Edwards, Lee R., "War and Roses: The Politics of *Mrs. Dalloway,*" in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism,* edited by Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards, University of Massachusetts Press, 1977, pp. 161-77.

This essay provides an important and informative aspect on the politics of *Mrs. Dalloway.*

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* Oxford University Press, 1975.

Fussel's text is a definitive book on WWI□its life in the popular imagination, the way soldiers experienced it, and the poetry of its soldiers.

Lee, Hermione, *Virginia Woolf,* Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996.

Lee presents a recent and highly readable biography of the author.

Thomas, Sue, "Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shellshock," in *English Language Notes,* Vol. 25, No. 2, December 1987, pp. 49-57.

Thomas offers an examination of the literature and attitudes about shell shock in Woolf's time.

Zwerdling, Alex, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World,* University of California Press, 1986.

Zwerdling's book discusses the social and political contexts and arguments of Woolf's novels.

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Henke, Suzette A., "*Mrs. Dalloway:* the Communion of Saints," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf,* edited by Jane Marcus, University of Nebraska Press, 1981, pp. 125-47.

Jensen, Emily, "Clarissa Dalloway's Respectable Suicide," in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant,* edited by Jane Marcus, University of Nebraska Press, 1983, pp. 162-79.

Page, Alex, "A Dangerous Day: Mrs. Dalloway and Her Double," in *Modern Fiction Studies,* Vol. VII, No. 2, Summer 1961, pp. 115-24.

Woolf, Virginia, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* edited by Anne Olivier Bell with Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols., Hogarth Press, 1977-1984.

□□□, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Gender of Modernism,* edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, Indiana University Press, 1990.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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