



## Mrs. Dalloway

Virginia Woolf, Maureen Howard (Foreword)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Mrs. Dalloway

*Virginia Woolf , Maureen Howard (Foreword)*

**Mrs. Dalloway** Virginia Woolf , Maureen Howard (Foreword)

In this vivid portrait of one day in a woman's life, Clarissa Dalloway is preoccupied with the last-minute details of party preparation while in her mind she is much more than a perfect society hostess. As she readies her house, she is flooded with far-away remembrances. And, met with the realities of the present, Clarissa reexamines the choices she has made, hesitantly looking ahead to growing old. Undeniably triumphant, this is the inspired novelistic outline of human consciousness.

## Mrs. Dalloway Details

Date : Published September 24th 1990 by Mariner Books (first published 1923)

ISBN : 9780156628709

Author : Virginia Woolf , Maureen Howard (Foreword)

Format : Paperback 239 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Literature, Novels

 [Download Mrs. Dalloway ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Mrs. Dalloway ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Mrs. Dalloway Virginia Woolf , Maureen Howard (Foreword)**

---

## From Reader Review Mrs. Dalloway for online ebook

### Bookdragon Sean says

Virginia Woolf I hate you.

There I said it. Some authors you just don't get on with, and Woolf is right down the bottom of my shit list. I've got quite a few reasons why:

#### Artistic slaying

So there's a trend with each and every new artistic movement which involves pissing all over the one that came before it. The newness asserts its dominance by destroying the old; it's happened many times over history in all forms of artifice, whether it be literature, music, paintings or media in today's society. The point is Virginia Woolf is a bitch. Here's what she says about my beloved Jane Austen:

*"Anyone who has the temerity to write about Jane Austen is aware of [two] facts: first, that of all great writers she is the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness; second, that there are twenty-five elderly gentlemen living in the neighbourhood of London who resent any slight upon her genius as if it were an insult to the chastity of their aunts"* - from *A Room of One's Own*.

And then this:

*"With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours! Their masterpieces certainly have a strange air of simplicity"* -from *Modern Fiction*.

Pffft....Is this woman for real? Don't worry Austen, I've got your back.

#### Her Style (or lack thereof)

So Virginia Woolf is one of the defining authors of the modernist movement; she wrote the manifesto and she wrote some of the novels. Some would even argue that she is modernism, but is that a good thing? As a cultural movement, I find modernism slightly disturbing. I'm a romantic at heart, I believe in the idealism of Percy Shelley, Wordsworth's vision of nature and Coleridge's imagination; thus, I feel like I am naturally predisposed to react negatively towards the movement. Is this reader response theory at work? Yes it is, I've warned you I'm incredibly bias towards this.

It focuses on a more suburban way of life, and analyses the relationship between humans and the city. Therefore, we have pages and pages of material in which the characters wonder round the streets looking at random things. They observe the sights and they observe each other in a stream of mundane consciousness. They remark on nature and almost, almost, compare it to this new modern life. And this is where I throw my book at the wall. How could the two even be put together in a paragraph? The words Virginia Woolf uses to describe these things are ill at ease in my mind: they don't belong here:

*"Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good*

*temper; and now again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.”*

Is city life natural? Can we really describe a city in these terms? Woolf proposes to capture the real essence of life; this passage here isn't life: it feels false. Who walks through a city sees a leaf and is enamoured by its beauty. No one. Step outside the city and experience life in the true Wordsworth fashion, visit the lakes see the trees, and see real nature. Granted, the Romantics made it sound sublime, but they captured the heart of it: they didn't combine city life, with its connotations of ordinariness and industry, with the real essence of nature.

### **Real life is dull**

So Woolf attempts (cough cough) to capture real life, modernism was said to be more real than realism. This isn't some exciting plot or twisted love story or gothic drama: this is a book about a woman who hosts a very dull party. She walks round the city a few times making some disjointed descriptions, ponders a shell shocked victim, realises she never fulfilled her repressed lesbian desires, notices that the prime minister is in fact an ordinary man (shock horror- hold onto your seats!) and that's it. So this new modern thing then, is it good?

In the case of this book, no, it's not. It takes more than a rejection of literary norms to establish greatness. I've read modernists next since this one and I've actually enjoyed them. Sometimes I feel like Woolf didn't know quite what she wanted when she wrote this, I feel like other writers adhere closer to her manifesto than she does herself. And, well, they don't attack Austen.

---

### **Bram says**

While reading her works, I get the impression that Virginia Woolf knows everything about people and that she understands life better than anyone, ever. Is there a single hidden feeling or uncommon perspective with which she is *not* intimately acquainted? And does anyone else draw forth these feelings and perspectives with more grace and empathy, and impart them to us in such a lush, inimitable fashion? Perhaps. But you'd never think that while immersed in her exquisite, adult dramas. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's able to achieve complete well-roundedness for a half-dozen people in a smattering of pages; where each person is valuable and each is misguided, where disagreements truly have two (or more) reasonable sides, where issues of right wrong black white are utterly absent, dismissed as child's play, uninteresting. Woolf allows her characters to hate as well as to love, and everyone must expose their private, raw feelings to the reader.

I want to get to know Virginia Woolf; I want to absorb her wisdom and to see the world through her eyes, with her soul: wise, beautiful, understanding. She's one of the few authors whose writing is so evocative and filled with human beings so well-drawn that I frequently drift into thoughts of my own life, comparing myself to Peter Walsh or Clarissa Dalloway or Hugh Whitbread or Sally Seton, ferreting out my own shortcomings as I see them gently spread out in Woolf's oh-so-real characters. Many people who've read Woolf's shorter works admit surprise at how long it takes to finish them, even if one is fully engrossed. I think this is why: her writing invokes open-ended reverie that's profoundly personal and inescapable.

Woolf's prose is fantastic, although I prefer that of *To the Lighthouse*, which has a haunted, ethereal beauty that's better-fit for the Isle of Skye than for London's busy streets. Still, she has a poetic way with

descriptions that I find so aesthetically pleasing. *First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable.* Is there a better (better-sounding, at least) description of Big Ben's tolling? In many passages, the stops and starts feel abrupt, strange to the reading mind. But for whatever reason, it simply feels right; always just enough and never more.

It's difficult to discuss or sum up the plot of this book, which moves fluidly from the streaming conscious of one character to the next. This passing of the story-telling baton is so subtle, however, that I can't remember a single transition. None. These moments would likely deserve study and genuflection in an inevitable rereading. I suspect that *Mrs. Dalloway* is one of those books you can not only reread and enjoy at different stages in life, but one that will offer distinct new pleasures and wisdoms at each stage. In other words, it's the best kind of book.

*Mrs. Dalloway* ultimately builds toward the title character's dinner party, but I actually found this finale to be somewhat less interesting than the parts that came before. We're introduced to many new characters in the final 25 pages, which, despite the fact that each one gets no more than a paragraph of time (and some must share), is something of a nuisance after becoming attached to five or six major players. She wraps things up well with the mainstays though, and the ending manages to be both understated and stirring, providing the readers with the pain *and* relief that comes with confession.

Upon finishing, the first thing that popped into my mind was Radiohead: Everything. In its right place.

---

## Kalliope says

I love travelling by train, and this is one of the best environments for reading. Luckily I got a seat for myself and the coach is pleasant. There is so much light. How enjoyable!

What a funny way to start the book. Someone says that Clarissa Dalloway is setting off to buy the flowers. But here is the famous quote *What a lark!, what a plunge!*, but it is not quite at the beginning of the book and cannot quite join other iconic beginnings like *Call me Ishmael..* or *Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure..* or *En un lugar de la Mancha de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme..*

Regent's park is certainly my favourite park in London. She is walking through this green and fresh and cool park. Did she mention that she was going to get the flowers? She meets a certain Hugh Whitbread and talks of doctors. I'd better write down the name. I always forget the names when reading. This Peter must have been her love. She is now 52; earlier the age of 18 is mentioned. We see her at two different ages then. And we hear more about her would-be husband. Right at the beginning. I wonder where this is taking us. Now I want to know more about her husband Richard. What is he like? if she keeps him absent.

What a weird thing to say, that *it was silly to have other reasons for doing things.* Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard *who did things for themselves.* This quote makes me even more curious with the husband.

Peter is half Indian half English. He seems more intriguing now; I feel curiosity to know more of his background.

Offering newspapers now. No, gracias. I do not have the least interest in reading one. My treat is to have these hours to read my books and continue with dreamy Clarissa instead of current affairs.

Now she mentions flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, arum lilies and carnations. This bouquet does not equal Proust's flowers in spite of the beauty of English gardens. Carnations are the flowers most fittingly worn by gypsies. Scarlet carnations.

I am bit confused with this Septimus Warren Smith, what a weird name and makes funny initials, SMS (Short Message Service). He is 30. How curious, Woolf's writing is so fluid but exact ages are given to several of the characters. What is this noise thing? I don't get it. The Britishness continues, now with Royal family and Ascot and Hurlingham and the Empire and Gent's clubs and, of course, the Tatler.

Those svelte windmills fruit of the new aerodynamics and huge and powerful turbines in this barren landscape of La Mancha. This is such a different view from the greenness of Regent's park, and the contrast between what I see and what I imagine almost hurts my eyes. I wonder what the dear mythical figure of Don Quijote would have made of these modern windmills; he could not have thought they were giants, they are too slender.

The noise is from a car. But the explosion has not brought memories from the war to the characters. She mentions the sounds heard and the harmonies and describes the space between sound. I like this. Poor Lucrezia; she says that to love makes one solitary. What a sad thing to say. And now this strange sentence, that it is cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself. It makes me very uncomfortable to read such a premonition for Virginia.

We are in Lucrezia's mind now and I have not noticed how imperceptibly we – the other readers and I – are shifted from the mind of a person to another one. I am finding myself reading back.

Back to Clarissa, now in her living room, looking at the silver and mending her silk dress, with the thimble. My mother always reminded me to use the thimble, which I never quite got the hang of it. I cling to dates and to hard facts whenever they are included, otherwise I feel like swimming in the open sea. So, Peter was in love with Clarissa in the 90s, and talks about the death of her soul. And five years have passed since the end of the war. And Peter now is 53, so one year older than Clarissa.

And here is another scene with flowers, and this time there are holly hocks, dahlias. I will have to look in google images to see what holly hocks look like. *Make them float with heads cut off and make them float on water.* This also reminds me of Odette who had her flowers floating on water, giving the scene a whiff of a brothel. Aunt Helen thinks that it is wicked to treat flowers like that. Quite right! So, yes, Proust is right in mentioning this as a sign of vulgarity.

And now they bring lunch. Good. Nowadays the service in trains is as it was in planes before. My tray arrives. I suppose I am hungry and welcome the interruption. I put my book aside and note the green and ivory of the seats and walls of the train coach.

The two women kiss on the lips. Again Woolf's ghost enters through her writing. I perk up as Peter Walsh arrives to visit Clarissa. This accelerates the pulse of the plot and my curiosity is awakened. Do I detect a smack of envy in Peter? He does not like the importance of the social positions of Hugh and Dalloway but plans *to ask them to put him into some secretary's office* with the idea of earning him *about 500 a year*. So, he does like that importance of the two men after all, if he can also obtain a benefit.

Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind. Another modernist concept and representational issues again. Once one is aware of this, there is no going back. There is a comment now on the strange name of Septimus. So, it is indeed a strange name. It wasn't just my idea.

I think I am getting the hang of how consciousness shifts from one person to another and it is through this subtle use of the third person. Before you realize it acts as a bridge and you are inside someone else's mind.

One can feel the depression in this book, in spite of all the beautiful things mentioned.

I flick back to Jarndyce & Jarndyce and take a break. What a change of gears this is with Dickens alliterations and repetitions, hammering ideas and making sure that he does not lose a reader and that the reader knows well where he stands.

One can watch a movie too, which is about to start, but I prefer to continue reading.

Peter Walsh is thinking of Clarissa on top of a bus. He goes through Shaftesbury Avenue. No matter how many years go by this avenue will always make me think of the Shaftesbury Psalter under its glass case at the British museum and subject of one of my BA theses. So very beautiful. Now that the British Library has moved to King's Cross it may no longer be on display.

Peter arrives at the hotel and reads her letter. This is a very good view into Clarissa. The temptation to live at its extremes in contrast to the assurance of an established and predictable life. This dilemma is so relevant to so many people, it is uncanny. What she said before about doing things, like her party, because she loves life does not ring entirely true. Has she fled from life in rejecting Peter?

Bartlett pears. What is going on? Oh, Peter is eating and observing and being observed by a Mr and Mrs Morris from Liverpool. Walsh wears glasses and we are shifting again. Walsh has the manners of the upper class and this is what the Bartlett pears say. Is there bitterness in Woolf's irony?, do I detect that she is snobbish after all, by paying so much attention to clues in social behaviour, to judge someone so much based on the person's social standing?

There is something about Walsh that does not seem very attractive to me. He appears very well pleased with himself because the Morrises like him and all because of the Bartlett pears. Not only does she give the age of the characters, we are following the clock. I realize now and flick some pages back. Big Ben is ordering the life of Londoners. In one and a half hours we arrive at Alicante.

By law he has to be interned, if he has expressed desires to kill himself. I did not know that. Was Virginia Woolf confined? Most probably. I will have to read a biography on her.

Geraniums just seem out of place in London. This city calls for more delicate flowers and colours. Tough geraniums belong to the streets of Granada under its torrid sun and adorning whitewashed walls.

Consciousness moves like a camera, shifting viewpoints and positing itself behind the eyes of different characters but it does not really change its nature as it shifts. It just records a different discourse but language throughout remains the same... Do we really enter the characters? I am not sure.

Finally the husband moves in. Richard Dalloway. I like him and yet I think we are not supposed to. Conservatism vs freedom?

I like the image of Lady Bruton and the hold she thinks she has on her guests. *And they went further and further away from her, being attached to her by a thin thread... which would stretch and stretch, get thinner an thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread..* It reminds me of Mm de Guermante's eyes moving and walking away while continuing to being attached to her body by a loose thread.

They look at Spanish jewellery. What is meant by this?, *Isabelinas*?

Esther's Narration, I mean Esther Summerson's, and her sweetness and clarity of mind. Around seventy five years earlier, the life span of a person, and the language has been turned around. These modernists

metamorphosed representation. Did Woolf like Dickens?

One O'clock . Exact time and the age of characters are fixed and defined, and the rest flows. Big Ben sound takes us back to Clarissa's drawing room, and suddenly we jump into 3 o'clock. Two hours for two paragraphs. Where is *La durée*?

Yes, I like Richard Dalloway; he is more true to himself than Walsh. He is content even if he does not bring himself to tell her that he loves her. She is not feeling regret and I sense that she did the right choice. Walsh is full of intentions but does not succeed in taking off.

And her Party begins, and it is a bit boring to read. Spanish shawls are mentioned. What are these? *Mantillas* or *mantones de Manila* They must be the second; the first would be too churchy for this setting. They are not Spanish but Chinese even if they arrived to Europe via Manila.

Finally the two men finally face each other. Everything is so buried and so well guarded and civilized that this scene just comes and goes.

Alicante. I can smell the sea with gratitude as soon as we step out of the train station. I have not been here for years. This time the centre of town, as we zigzag through the maze of streets in the taxi, makes me realize what a Moorish city it is, no wonder with such a name as Al-Laquant. These narrow streets and alleys and buildings of massive golden stone remind me of La Valleta. A port to the sea.

The choice is between roses and Geopolitik. Are we supposed to despise Clarissa, Virginia?, No, *what she liked was simply life. That is what I do it for..... to life.* The two different aspects of India, the political or the beauty, clash. The pulling forces are the tensions for the Empire or the orchids and magnificent mountains. Everything is India. And now she sees herself carried on the back of coolies. Well, here Virginia's conception of Clarissa is clear. If there were any doubts about what Woolf thinks of Clarissa now we know.

The Bradshaws arrive. Ah, yes, the doctor; so yes Septimus has killed himself. I have to go back and reread that section. So subtle. I think about reading, how much the reader brings in. I knew this and project it in the text. How did I know it? The section is written as a watercolour. We see the defined picture of what has happened in Clarissa's party. Is she heartless?, her party and the life of a suffering youth. Clarissa made out of smiling and glossy cardboard. She did not pity him. She is upset her party is being damaged. But it is Woolf herself, the creator, and not the Bradshaws, who is spoiling her party. She has served it on a platter in front of Clarissa's nose, in spite of her flowers.

Are SMS and Clarissa two sides of the same coin? Not perfectly. Clarissa's love of life is presented as superficial and not as, literally, life-saving. And I feel the same with the dilemma presented by the two men in her life. I would have expected Peter Walsh to present a more tantalizing view of life. She settles, contentedly, for the middle way.

I enjoy being in the Paseo now, parallel to the beach and with all those yachts, and watching passers-by. The pavement with those wave patterns in black and white and the palm trees, the distinctive image of Alicante. This pavement is from the 1930s, almost from Clarissa's time. Will sit at the *heladería* and finish this.

No, I am not trying to imitate Virginia Woolf. Who would dare? It is just that whenever I read one of her books my mind wanders off to nowhere, or to another book, or to myself.

For there she was.

For here I am.

Looking at the sea.

And yes, what a lark!, what a plunge!

---

### **Sarah says**

Mrs. Dalloway is one of those books one is supposed to adore for its disruption of convention and innovative use of time, sound, parallel narrative structure etc. While I respect and admire the literary advances VW makes with this novel, I just can't get into it. I've read it three times over the course of my reading life, once at 17 then at 21, and finally just a few months ago. I find it sleepy like dozing in a warm insect filled garden, which is not a bad way to spend an afternoon (as long as you have some DEET), but ultimately doesn't jolt me into action, revelation, excitement, or motivation. Rather, Mrs. Dalloway really annoys me as a character, and I feel the need to explore this since many of my friends cringe when I tell them I'm just not that into her. I'll continue trying to figure out my problem with this novel and post an update someday. Meanwhile, if there is anyone out there who sort of doesn't like it too, please let me know; I feel lonely.

---

### **Jim Fonseca says**

Virginia Woolf set out to write an unconventional novel and succeeded, although since she wrote, we have read so many unconventional novels that it seems tame. In her introduction to the edition I read, Maureen Howard writes: "If ever there was a work conceived in response to the state of the novel, a consciously modern novel, it is Mrs. Dalloway." She may have been influenced by Ulysses because all the action occurs in one day. Church bells mark significant events. In turn this marking of the day influenced *The Hours*, a book based on Woolf's life, by Michael Cunningham.

But unlike in Joyce's work, this is not an ordinary day. True, it centers on what we would now call a cocktail party – Mrs. Dalloway lived for those and hosted them frequently – but it's also the day when a former flame of hers (the fire on his part, not hers) returns from five years in India. And it's also a day when one of the characters we follow commits suicide. His doctor arrives at the party and announces this to everyone as soon as he's inside the door – now there's a downer!

Through her reflections and that of several other characters we learn the details of Mrs. Dalloway's life. She's 52, pale, a bit sickly, attractive enough but not beautiful. We learn of her husband, a nice man, a government bureaucrat whose career has peaked – he will never be a Minister. She worries about him having a business lunch today with another woman friend of hers and Mrs. Dalloway was not invited. Of her daughter, she worries that she is being "unduly influenced" by the religion of her female tutor (Catholicism?). And of course she worries about meeting the old flame – he still loves her after 30 years, a marriage and various affairs. True love or arrested development?

The book, published in 1925, is also a time capsule of daily life in London in the early post-war years. (WW I of course.) A time when horses had been replaced by cars. As we follow her around town in her preparations we see the hustle and bustle of the city, the grocers, the shop girls, the crazies in the park.

A good book. It makes you think about life and death. You can't ask for more than that. Her language is also

fun. When is the last time you were “whelmed?” Not overwhelmed – just plain old whelmed. What’s a Holland bag? Even on the web, apparently no one knows.

---

## **Paul Bryant says**

### **THE TERMINATOR 2 OF DOILEYS**

I can see why people hate Mrs-Dalloway-the-book (there are a fair few this-is-so-boring-I-lit-myself-on-fire kind of one/two star reviews) because Mrs Dalloway-the-book is the Terminator 2 of doileys, ribbons, and fetching hats, the Die Hard 4 of a sunny day in London, 1923, the Apocalypso of curtains and place mats and memories of moonlight boating parties; and the Transformers of wondering if you married the right person.

You have to get into Mrs Woolf’s style, which is a nimsywimsymimsy breathless-hush exalted stream of consciousness thing, all the sentences, if that’s what they are, make zigzags like mad flies, they each contain at least 29 commas, the pages zag randomly or not from one character’s brain to another (did you ever see Slacker? Like that, but more British), and as usual in these high falutin affairs, there’s zero story. You want a story? Lowbrow oik! Oh, okay, she’s having a party, and a guy is having problems from shellshock, and then she has the party and people come, rich types. End. Don’t look for anything else.

### **STUCK UP SELF-ADMIRING TORY COW**

I can also see why you’d hate Mrs Dalloway herself, too, stuck-up self-admiring Tory cow. For the first 50 pages I was really hating on her doileys and her oh-gosh-I-was-so-clever-to-marry-the-right-man untrammelled egotism. Oh, little me, and all of this sparkly stuff, how lucky and deserving I am! She’s more than a little repulsive. But of course not to the people in her life, they’re all like oh Clarissa, let me fondle your doileys. (Except one, hah! But she’s ugly as sin, and a religious nutjob, so, you know, those sorry types are bound not to be in love with Clarissa. )

[not a good picture - Mrs D would think this was VULGAR]

Mrs Woolf winds her famous slippery metaphysical twistical delirious poetical lyrical ecstatic style through the minds of around six main characters who orbit each other during this one June day, a solar system of social engagement. What you have going on is 1923-style 360 degree feedback appraisals! Yes, that intolerable oppressive management tool of the 21st century is right here, as all the characters relentlessly judge each other and are judged in turn, and most, even dear Clarissa, come in for some industrial strength sneering by their nearest and dearest, they all condescend and look down upon each other, and then they flip and start making googoo eyes, it’s all a bit emotionally high-strung and vapid. Anyway this lot are my class enemy (they haven’t gone away) (but also they did create 90% of the great art, or pay the artists to create it, so I am a bit conflicted about the upper class) - but I was kind of hoping there would be a Russian communist with a bomb to blow them all to buggery when they all got to the party but it’s not that sort of novel. Instead it’s actually

### **THE TAO OF WOOLF**

The warp and the weft, the weep and the woof, life itself, never so well expressed – here's Clarissa:

*She feared time itself, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced, how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl.*

That's it – that's this novel

### **ONLY FOUR STARS - HUH?**

I have to admit that quite a bit of the brain-delving and soul-surfing (and there is nothing here which isn't) made no literal sense to me, I just could not follow what was being said & would love to ask a major Dalloway fan exactly what this or that passage was on about. So it does - towards the end - slightly turn into exquisite Woolfian background music. It is for that reason I cannot grant the elusive fifth star.

### **THE WANDERING ROCKS**

One year before Mrs D, Joyce published Ulysses, and VW had a copy. One of the chapters in Ulysses is The Wandering Rocks in which several characters peregrinate through Dublin, and Joyce streams their consciousnesses, jumping from person to person. And of course, like Ulysses, Mrs D happens all on one day. And Bloomsday and Dallowday are set in capital cities in the month of June.

Other than that, VW's version of the interior monologue is completely utterly different.

### **DAVID BOWIE IMPLIED**

At one point a random young woman down in London for a job thinks she'll remember this day, her first day in the big city. Fifty years from now she'll still remember it, she thinks. So it being 1923 in the novel, that means she'll be remembering it in June 1973 while *Life on Mars* by David Bowie or *Skweeze Me Pleeze Me* by Slade plays from a nearby radio. There's an odd thought.

### **WOOLFISH GRIN**

VW is even, rarely, funny - a young man falls for his English tutor :

*He thought her beautiful, believed her impeccably wise; dreamed of her, wrote poems to her, which, ignoring the subject, she corrected in red ink.*

## ?ntellecta says

England in 1923. A land between world wars, between tradition and modernity. Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, "Mrs Dalloway"

This book offers many partial even very modern approaches, reflecting the role of woman in society, the importance of marriage, the mental illness as a sign of our time, the consequences of war, the power of medicine and much more ..."

Ps:If you like the technique "Stream of consciousness "the book is suitable for you.

---

## Jeffrey Keeten says

**“So on a summer’s day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying ‘that is all’ more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking.”**

We first meet Clarissa Dalloway and her husband Richard in *The Voyage Out*. Too many pages have been turned since my reading of Virginia Woolf's first novel for me to remember that I've met them before. It is similar to meeting someone at a party and then meeting them again several years later. I might have a sliver of memory of meeting them before. I always find it awkward to decide to confess that I do have a vague memory of them, potentially subtly unintentionally insulting them, or brazen it out with of course I remember you (potential minefield if my slender memory is in fact wrong). There is always the option of hitting the restart button by saying what a pleasure it is to meet them.

Some of this, of course, is entirely up to how they play it and if they remember meeting me before.

Clarissa Dalloway would know exactly how to handle that situation. If she did bungle it, she would recover the situation with a little laugh and say something along the lines of how silly she is about names and faces. I feel that Virginia was a bit harsh in her description of Clarissa in *The Voyage Out*. *Clarissa is "a tall slight woman, her body wrapped in furs, her face in veils, with artistic tastes and inclinations, but no brain whatsoever."* I think that Clarissa has become who she was supposed to be not, as we find out, who she wanted to be. She has become Mrs. Richard Dalloway, and her identity beyond that has become a series of sepia toned memories of her brief life before marriage.

If you were to look in any phone book for Phillips County, Kansas, from 1954 to 1995, you would find listed a Mrs. Dean Keeten. From the moment Leota Irene Chester (22) married Dean Leo Keeten she became known as Mrs. Dean Keeten. My grandfather died in 1954, but when she checked herself into the hospital in 1995, for what became the last time, she still registered as Mrs. Dean Keeten. To her, the only power she had existed in my grandfather's name. I can only think that she was well aware of the powerlessness of women and wanted people to believe that if they irritated her they would have to deal with her husband, ghostly though he was. I'd like to think, too, that there was a lingering pride in being married to the man.

Clarissa has trepidations over the changes in herself. She is feeling older. ". . . *June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dog barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly **shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed....***"

Clarissa is planning a party while her doppelganger Septimus Smith is considering his death. "*He is linked to Clarissa through his anxieties about sexuality and marriage; his anguish about mortality and immortality; and his acute sensitivities to his surroundings, which have gone over the line into madness.*"

### **Birds sing in Greek.**

He is haunted by the war, in particular his memories of his friend Evans who died in the closing months of the war.

He hallucinates.

He is certainly suffering from acute shell shock. He is: "*Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?* I do wonder if there weren't some homosexual overtones to his relationship with Evans. I like the idea because if he is a true doppelganger of Clarissa, then her thoughts and memories of Sally Seton tie in so nicely.

I would say Clarissa was smitten at first sight. "*But all that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an extraordinary beauty of the kind she most admired, dark, large-eyes, with that quality which, since she hadn't got it herself, she always envied--a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything;....*" Sally must have been a handful because the strained relations with her family necessitated a span of time apart. There is the hope that an unruly child will act better with others than they do with their own family. A kiss shared between the two girls is remembered by Clarissa as one of the most passionate moments in her life.

Sally does come to the party, now married, now Lady Rosseter with five sons. She is completely reformed and conformed to the very aspects I'm sure she found so infuriating about her family.

Clarissa also has an old flame, Peter Walsh, who is back from India just in time to attend her party. She has not seen Sally or Peter for many years so her party is infused with a certain level of warped nostalgia. Though really one gets the impression that Clarissa might have preferred leaving them both suspended in time when they were who she remembered them to be.

She...you see... jilted Peter for Richard.

Peter is still in love with her. As she analyzes her thoughts of Peter, it is certainly on a more practical level than a romantic one. She considers, without any gossamer wrapped sentimentality, what her life would have been like if she had married him.

In his pockets Peter carries a menagerie of totems. "*...his knife, his watch; his seals, his note-case, and Clarissa's letter which he would not read again but liked to think of, and Daisy's photograph?*" The knife he pulls out whenever he is nervous and opens and closes it. This trait so annoys Clarissa. It is potentially comparable to fondling oneself into arousal. I had the impression that if he were to lose everything he owned except for those few things he carried on his person, he would be fine. If he were to lose those precious items, he would be out of sorts for quite some time and would be slow to recover from their loss.

Peter has trouble with women, leaving scandals in his wake wherever he goes. He falls in love too easily, which could be attributed to a naturally romantic manner. He once followed a girl for a half hour and, from the scant information he gained about her, nearly fell in love with her. Easy to do when you have only flipped through the pages very quickly without taking the time to actually read the narrative. I'd like to think that the reason he is this way is because of the torch he still carries for Clarissa. Nothing else will ever be as real for him anyway. Of course, the woman he loved no longer exists either.

Clarissa shares some of her thoughts on death after she hears the chatter at her party about the suicide of Septimus Smith. *"Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death."* The reverence with which this statement about death is made put a shiver down my back. Woolf admitted that she had difficulty writing about the madness of Septimus. She used some of her own depression inspired hallucinations to describe his distressing anxiety. She had planned for Clarissa to die at the end of the novel, but shifted that role to Septimus. Not that I think Clarissa is Virginia, but there are certainly aspects to her thought processes that are shared with Woolf. It may have been too bold, too frightening for those who knew Virginia to have Clarissa kill herself.

The treatment, if you call it that, of Septimus is a condemnation of psychology in post WW1 British society. Woolf was treated by several incompetent doctors for her own struggles with depression. Sir William Bradshaw, the famous psychiatrist, who was treating Septimus often bragged about his ability to determine a person's problems, and to also be able to prescribe a treatment in five minutes or less. Obviously, his respect for his own profession is rather cavalier, and certainly his dismissive attitude to the true nature of mental illness is reprehensible.

Virginia Woolf put stones in her pockets, walked into the river Ouse, and drowned herself sixteen years after the publication of this novel. I often think how long she had been considering suicide before she actually made that final decision.

I had planned to start this book and then set it aside while I finished another book. That turned out to be impossible. Mrs. Dalloway would not tolerate any rivals. I was hers for the duration. It is a modest book in regards to size, but so packed with so many wonderful observations that I could continue, with ease, to write several more thousand words regarding other aspects of this novel. I loved the style. There is a bounce to the writing as if springs have been attached to the words to keep them from miring down in meditative thought. The characters, though possessing few characteristics that I admire, were likeable, and today I actually find myself missing them as if I had toddled off to India or the West Indies.

The ending was superb.

**"What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? Peter thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?"**

**It is Clarissa, he said.**

**For there she was."**

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

## s.penkevich says

*'Moments like this are buds on the tree of life.'*

Our lives are an elaborate and exquisite collage of moments. Each moment beautiful and powerful on their own when reflected upon, turned about and examined to breath in the full nostalgia for each glorious moment gone by, yet it is the compendium of moments that truly form our history of individuality. Yet, what is an expression of individuality if it is not taken in relation to all the lives around us, as a moment in history, a drop in a multitude of drops to form an ocean of existence? Virginia Woolf enacts the near impossibility in *'Mrs Dalloway'* of charting for examination and reflection the whole of a lifeline for multiple characters, all interweaving to proclaim a brilliant portrait of existence itself, all succinctly packaged in the elegant wrappings of a solitary day. Akin to Joyce's monumental achievement, *Ulysses*, Woolf's poetic plunge into the minds and hearts of her assorted characters not only dredges up an impressively multi-faceted perspective on their lives as a whole, but delivers a cutting social satire extending far beyond the boundaries of the selective London society that struts and frets their 24 hours upon the stage of Woolf's words.

*'Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.'*

This simple phrase is one any serious student of literature would recognize lest they fear an inadequacy of appearance in the eyes of their collegiate classmates, much in the way a great deal of actions in *Mrs Dalloway* is a learned behavior for the sake of appearances. *'Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame,'* and much of what we do out of habit, out of adherence to social standards, is what upholds the society at hand and shapes the civilization of the times. Woolf's novel hinges upon manners and social standings, highlighting a withering hegemony during the a period of change and rebirth with society marching forward into an uncertain and unrestrained future following the first World War. However, before getting too far ahead into a broad scope, it is imperative to examine the immediate and singular implications of the novel. Much of *Mrs Dalloway* is deceptively simplistic, using the singular as a doorway into the collective, and offering a tiny gift of perfect that can be unpacked to expose an infinite depiction of the world. Take the title, for instance. In most cases, the central character is referred to as Clarissa Dalloway, yet it was essential to place Mrs Dalloway first and foremost in the readers mind to forever bind their impression of her as a married woman, an extension of Mr. Richard Dalloway. In comparison, Miss Kilman is never addressed in text without the title 'Miss' to emphasize her unmarried—and, in terms of the social standings of the time, inferior—position in society; or even Ellie Henderson whose poverty doesn't even earn her a title of marital status in the eyes of the Dalloway circle, forever condemned to a singular name inconsequential to anything. Just the indication of Clarissa as the wife of a member of government expands well beyond her status as an individual to open a conversation about social implications.

*'Mrs Dalloway is always giving parties to cover the silence.'*

Personal identity plays a major theme within the novel with each character's entire life on display simply through their actions and reflection within the solitary June day. Clarissa is examined through a weaving of past and present as she tumbles through an existential crises in regards to her position as the wife of a dignitary and as a the perfect party host. *'Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow?'* Through her interactions with Peter, the reader is treated to her romantic lineage, rejecting Peter for the safer, more social circle security of Robert, which gives way to a questioning if she is merely a snob. Furthermore, the reader witnesses Clarissa in her heights of emotion through her friendship with Sally Seton<sup>1</sup>, a relationship that seems to transcend the rigid gender roles of the time.

*The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women.*

Virginia Woolf's own sexuality has been a topic of interest over the years, and the relationship between Clarissa and Sally—the kiss shared between them being considered by Clarissa to be a notable peak of happiness in her life—is open to interpretation. However, this aspect of Clarissa's life and identity allows for one of the numerous footholds of feminism found throughout the text, giving way to an image of Sally rejecting standard gender roles through examples such as her openly smoking cigars. Through Clarissa we see a desire of life, of not becoming stagnant, of not *'being herself invisible; unseen; unknown...this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.'* There must be a way to separate from the society, to form an identity beyond social conventions or gender, to find life in a world hurtling towards death.

*'Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you.'*

As a foil to the character of Clarissa, Woolf presents the war-torn Septimus. While Clarissa finds meaning in her merrymaking because *'what she liked was simply life'*, and bringing people together to be always moving towards a warm center of life, Septimus is shown as moving outwards, stolen away from the joys of life through his experiences of bloodshed in battle.

*So there was no excuse, nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel.*

While Clarissa grapples with her fear of death, *'that is must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all,'* Septimus finds life, a never-ending spiral of guilt for not feeling beset by visions of his fallen comrade, to be a fearsome and loathsome beast. Doctors would have him locked away (a dramatic contrast to the lively parties hosted by Clarissa), and even his own wife forges an identity of guilt and self-conscious sorrow for upholding a clearly disturbed husband. This is a haunting portrait of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, the latter much like Woolf herself suffered. Septimus and Clarissa are like opposite sides to the same coin, however, and many essential parallels exist between them. Both find solace in the works of Shakespeare<sup>2</sup>, both obsess over a lonely figure in an opposing window (one of Septimus' last impressions in the land of the living), and both trying to express themselves in the world yet fearing the solitude that their failures will form for them. Even his inability to feel is similar to the love felt by Clarissa: *'But nothing is so strange when one is in love (and what was this except being in love?) as the complete indifference of other people.'*

Death becomes an important discussion point of the novel, with each character trying to define themselves in the face of, or in spite of, their impending demise. Peter so fears death that he follows a stranger through town, inventing an elaborate fantasy of romance to blot out the deathly darkness. Yet, it is in contrast to death that we find life. Clarissa's desire for communication, community and life is only given weight in relation to the news of death that invades her party.

*Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; repute faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.*

What is most impressive about *Mrs Dalloway* is the nearly endless array of tones and voices that Woolf is able to so deftly sashay between. While each character is unique, it is the contrast between death and life that she weaves that is staggeringly wonderful. Right from the beginning, Woolf treats us to a feast of contrast.

*For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed...but it was over; thank Heaven – over. It was June...and everywhere, thought it was still early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats...*

Cold death and warm life on a sunny June day all mingle together here, and throughout the novel. And we are constantly reminded of our lives marching towards death like a battalion of soldiers, each hour pounded away by the ringing of Big Ben. This motif is two-fold, both representing the lives passing from present to past, but also using the image of Big Ben as a symbol of British society. The war has ended and a new era is dawning, one where the obdurate and stuffy society of old has been shown to be withered and wilting, like Clarissa's elderly aunt with the glass eye. Not only are the lifelines of each character put under examination, but the history of the English empire as well, highlighting the ages of imperialism that have spread the sons of England across the map and over bloody battlefields. Clarissa is a prime example of the Euro-centrism found in society, frequently confusing the Albanians and Armenians, and assuming that her love of England and her contributions to society must in some way benefit them. '*Byt she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)*' In contrast is Peter, constantly toying with his knife—a symbol of masculinity imposed by an ideal enforced by bloodshed and military might—to evince not only his fears of inadequacy as a Man (fostered by Clarissa's rejection for him and his possibly shady marriage plans), but his wishy-washy feelings of imperialism after spending time in India.

*Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.*

*Mrs Dalloway* is nearly overwhelming in scope despite the tiny package and seemingly singular advancements of plot. Seamlessly moving between the minds and hearts of each character with a prose that soars to the stratosphere, Woolf presents an intensely detailed portrait of post-war Europe and the struggles of identity found within us all. While it can be demanding at times, asking for your full cooperation and attention, but only because to miss a single second would be a tragic loss to the reader, this is one of the most impressive and inspiring novels I have ever read. Woolf manages to take the scale of *Ulysses* and the poetic prowess of the finest poets, and condense it all in 200pgs of pure literary excellence. Simple yet sprawling, this is one of the finest novels of the 20th century and an outstanding achievement that stands high even among Woolf's other literary giants. This novel has a bit more of a raw feel when compared to *To the Lighthouse*, yet that work is nothing short of pure perfection, a novel so highly tuned that one worries that even breathing on it will tarnish it's sleek and shiny luster. *Dalloway* stands just as tall, however, both as a satire on society and a powerful statement of feminism. A civilization is made up of the many lives within, and each life is made up of many moments, all of which culminating to a portrait of human beauty. Though at the end of life we must meet death, it is through death we find life.

5/5

*It is a thousand pities never to say what one feels.*

<sup>1</sup> With regards to the discussion of marital titles, Sally Seton later becomes Lady Rosseter through marriage. This title further emphasizes marriage as a means of climbing the social ladder, with Sally seen in the past as an impoverished, rebellious ragamuffin, yet through marriage gains an aura of dignity. Perhaps Sally becoming a housewife is a statement on the society of the times suffocating feministic freedoms.

<sup>2</sup> There is an interesting rejection of Shakespeare found most notably in the characters of Richard Dalloway and Lady Bruton. This emphasized the dying British society as a cold and artless being, devoid of emotion. This is most evident through Richard Dalloway, seen as a symbol of British society, as he fails to express his emotions of love towards his wife.

## Kenny says

**What does the brain matter,” said Lady Rosseter, getting up, “compared with the heart?”**

I didn't realize, until the final page, at its heart, **MRS. DALLOWAY** is a love story. I absolutely loved this book.

Mrs. Dalloway is a complex and compelling novel. It is wrongly described as a portrait of a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway; this is not correct. Mrs. Dalloway is the hub that connects the spokes, the characters of Woolf's novel, but there is no main character. What this book is, is a wonderful study of its principal characters. The novel enters into the consciousness of the people it takes as its subjects, creating a powerful effect. With Mrs. Dalloway Woolf created a visceral and unyielding vision of madness and a haunting descent into its depths.

Mrs. Dalloway follows a set of characters as they go about their lives on a normal day. The eponymous character, Clarissa Dalloway, does simple things: she buys some flowers, walks in a park, is visited by an old friend and throws a party. She speaks to a man who was once in love with her, and who still believes that she settled by marrying her politician husband. She talks to a female friend with whom she was once in love. Then, in the final pages of the book, she hears about a poor lost soul who threw himself from a doctor's window onto a line of railings.

Septimus Smith. Shell-shocked after his experiences in World War I, he is a so-called madman, who hears voices. He was once in love with a fellow soldier named Evans--a ghost who haunts him throughout the novel. His infirmity is rooted in his fear and his repression of this forbidden love. Finally, tired of a world that he believes is false and unreal, he commits suicide.

The two characters whose experiences form the core of the novel--Clarissa and Septimus--share a number of similarities. In fact, Woolf saw Clarissa and Septimus as more like two different aspects of the same person, and the linkage between the two is emphasized by a series of stylistic repetitions and mirrorings. Unbeknownst to Clarissa and Septimus, their paths cross a number of times throughout the day--just as some of the situations in their lives followed similar paths.

Clarissa and Septimus were in love with a person of their own sex, and both repressed their loves because of their social situations. Even as their lives mirror, parallel and cross--Clarissa and Septimus take different paths in the final moments of the novel. Both are existentially insecure in the worlds they inhabit--one chooses life, while the other chooses death.

Woolf's stream of consciousness style allows readers into the minds and hearts of her characters. She also incorporates a level of psychological realism that Victorian novels were never able to achieve. The everyday is seen in a new light: internal processes are opened up in her prose, memories compete for attention, thoughts arise unprompted, and the deeply significant and the utterly trivial are treated with equal importance. Woolf's prose is also enormously poetic. She has the very special ability to make the ordinary ebb and flow of the mind sing.

Mrs. Dalloway is linguistically inventive, but the novel also has an enormous amount to say about its characters. Woolf handles their situations with dignity and respect. As she studies Septimus and his deterioration into madness, we see a portrait that draws considerably from Woolf's own experiences. Woolf's stream of consciousness-style leads us to experience madness. We hear the competing voices of sanity and insanity.

Woolf's vision of madness does not dismiss Septimus as a person with a biological defect. She treats the consciousness of the madman as something apart, valuable in itself, and something from which the wonderful tapestry of her novel could be woven.

---

## Henry Avila says

"What does the brain matter compared with the heart?" so states one of the last lines in this short, brilliant novel, a thought-provoking book, life is temporary after all. This phrase is about Mr. Richard Dalloway who works for the government in the early 1920's in London, England. Clarissa Dalloway's nice, steady husband, rather ordinary, he will never be a member of the prestigious cabinet, nevertheless she loves him, he reciprocates that emotion...she knows, but he's much too embarrassed to verbalize, showing it by giving wonderful flowers, yet there is something missing in her existence, she has a great husband, a beautiful, dutiful daughter Elizabeth 18, devoted to her father, a good home. She, while not pretty at 52, but attractive, gives glamorous, grand parties to her many friends and relatives, important people in society mostly. The movers and shakers in the nation, the perfect hostess, elegant, calm, sophisticated, always says the right thing to others, still she feels bored, needing excitement. Clarissa's mind constantly wanders, thinking and pondering, has she chosen the right path. The happy memories of the past, thirty years ago...of the frightening Peter her first love, wild Sally Seton, the best friend Clarissa ever had, so fearless, outrageous and amusing, everyone liked, Peter Walsh is coming back from India, a man she could have married, nothing dull about him, an unstable but always vibrant, her former lover, will be at the party (not very successful), rich Sally also, Mrs. Dalloway is uneasy. The narrative of the book takes place in just one day, the ubiquitous giant Big Ben clock, sounds the alarm, striking often, every hour, and more, as time flows by reminding her not only the party is near but life is limited, should not waste it, in idle dreams, live in the present, be content, this crazy, unpredictable, cold world... will not continue forever, not last. Virginia Woolf's most popular novel, still has dark aspects, the trying to forget, not possible...set a few years after the end of hostilities. A classic, from another era.vast sufferings of World War 1 soldiers, is vaguely mentioned (except for one character), the English



## Jason says

Experiencing *Mrs. Dalloway* is like being a piece of luggage on an airport conveyor belt, traversing lazily through a crowd of passengers, over and around and back again, but with the added bonus of being able to read people's thoughts as they pass; this one checking his flight schedule, that one arguing with his wife, the one over there struggling with her cart, bumping into those arguing and checking. For the most part, the ride is smooth as Woolf transitions from one consciousness to another. But at times, I find myself falling off the conveyor belt. Whether this is a result of my own inabilities or whether Woolf's dreamy style leads me naturally astray into my own wanderings, I do not know. But I do know that the effort to get back onto her belt are handsomely rewarded.

In short, this novel contains some of the most beautiful writing I've ever seen in print e-ink (welcome to the 21st century, Mrs D). But although quoting long passages in a Goodreads review is not usually my *modus operandi*, I feel I must do so here just to demonstrate my point. Have you ever had your mind so preoccupied with "stuff" that sometimes a passing comment triggers a strange feeling of *not quite right*-ness, a feeling which stems from the ability of your subconscious to somehow absorb the comment even while the conscious part of your brain has not yet had time to process it? This happens to me all the time, and that nagging feeling persists until I find time to reflect on what has caused it. Here Woolf captures the moment perfectly:

*But—but—why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy? As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another; no, it was not Sally Seton saying that Richard would never be in the Cabinet because he had a second-class brain (it came back to her); no, she did not mind that; nor was it to do with Elizabeth either and Doris Kilman; those were facts. It was a feeling, some unpleasant feeling, earlier in the day perhaps; something that Peter had said, combined with some depression of her own, in her bedroom, taking off her hat; and what Richard had said had added to it, but what had he said? There were his roses. Her parties! That was it! Her parties! Both of them criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!*

Besides shedding light on my own strange neurosis, I think this passage also reveals something interesting about Clarissa Dalloway. Why do Peter's comments about her being the perfect hostess bother her so much? Mrs. Dalloway often claims to be fortunate to have married a man who allows her to be independent, and to be grateful to have avoided a catastrophic marriage to one who would have stifled her. But to me, these are just rationalizations for her decision to marry someone with whom she does not share the kind of intimacy that she might have otherwise had. In a way, her parties have taken the place of that intimacy, though it is an intimacy on *her* terms—she is able to enjoy the company of her high society friends while still keeping them at a comfortable enough distance to shield them from learning too much about her. When Peter gently mocks her parties, it annoys her because it invariably results in her having to reconcile the sacrifices she has made in exchange for her current lifestyle.

Another noteworthy aspect of Woolf's writing is her acute description of post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD was not formally recognized until the 1970s, and even though documentation of symptoms was common in the 1940s when World War II veterans were being treated for "mental disturbances," the fact that Woolf delves into this subject as early as 1925 is pretty profound. Back then, shell shock meant that you were suffering from a form of "exhaustion," as if veterans of the Great War were no worse off than Britney Spears after a few too many nights out. In this regard, Septimus is a truly tragic character, a victim of a time

and place without the resources to help him. His mental anguish seems also to mirror the sufferings of the unrelated Mrs. Dalloway. In fact, despite crossing paths in only the most abstract of ways, Clarissa and Septimus have quite a bit in common. They both struggle to balance their private lives against the need for social inclusion, they both internalize their emotions at the expense of personal relationships, and they both end up having to make difficult choices (albeit with drastically different outcomes) about their respective futures.

It's true. *Mrs. Dalloway* offers remarkable insight into its characters and is certainly worth the effort. My only question is: does this conveyor belt stop here, or will it take me *To the Lighthouse*?

**[September 2012 Update]**

A recording of me reading this review can be found [here](#).

---

**Michael says**

Although famous for focusing upon a single day in the life of one woman, *Mrs. Dalloway* in fact ricochets from one interior life to the next, collapsing the present into the past as it does so. The novel is far less interested in defining Clarissa Dalloway as an individual than in exploring the many-sided effects she has on an assortment of others; by the end of the narrative, Woolf has offered her readers not a neat portrait of a personality but several impressionistic sketches of the same subject. Woolf's multifaceted characterization successfully thwarts attempts to sum up Mrs. Dalloway or to reduce her to her relationship with any one person. Likewise, the author's elaborate but accessible prose resists careless reading, forcing her readers to approach the short novel deliberately. *Mrs. Dalloway* was Woolf's first success at writing experimental long fiction, and it remains the perfect introduction to her mature work.

---