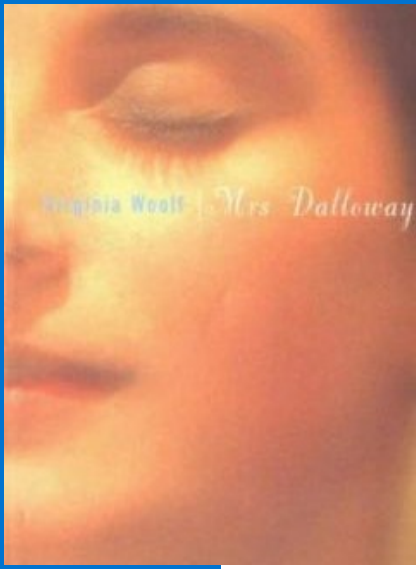


Mrs Dalloway



Author Background

Born: January 25th 1882, London.
Died: March 28th 1941, Rodmell, Sussex.
Lived: Kensington, Bloomsbury, Sussex

Virginia Woolf, born Adeline Virginia Stephen, was the daughter of scholar, philosopher and editor Sir Leslie Stephen, and his wife Julia Jackson who was also from a prominent artistic and literary family. She had four half-siblings and three siblings, Virginia was the youngest girl with one younger brother. The whole family lived at 22 Hyde Park Gate in Kensington in London, and holidayed often in St Ives in Cornwall. Either Cornwall or London are the settings for many of Virginia's novels. Virginia was determined to be a writer from an early age and had been allowed uncensored access to her father's extensive library throughout her childhood and youth.

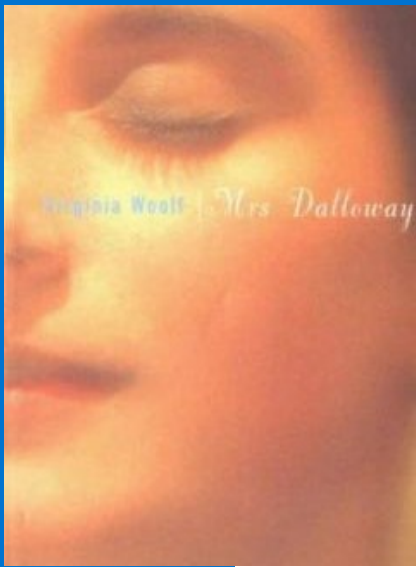
Virginia suffered the loss of both her mother and then her older half-sister before she was fifteen and this led to the first of her mental breakdowns. Her father died when she was only twenty two years old, and her older brother two years later. She and her remaining family moved from Kensington to Bloomsbury and were a vital part of the famous artistic milieu known as the Bloomsbury Group, including such artists and writers as Clive Bell, Vita Sackville-West and Lytton Strachey.

Virginia Woolf began writing her first novel *The Voyage Out* in 1908, it was published in 1913 and followed by many well known novels, short stories and essays. Many were published by Virginia and her husband Leonard Woolf's Hogarth press. They had married in 1912 and lived in London, and in Sussex, where Virginia took her own life in March 1941, during WWII.

Virginia Woolf is one of the most distinguished and influential writers of the mid-twentieth century. Her most famous novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves*, are perhaps best described as impressionistic, inspiring impressions rather than recreating reality.

Source: *The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain* website <http://http://www.virginiawoolsociety.co.uk/>

Mrs Dalloway



Book Summary

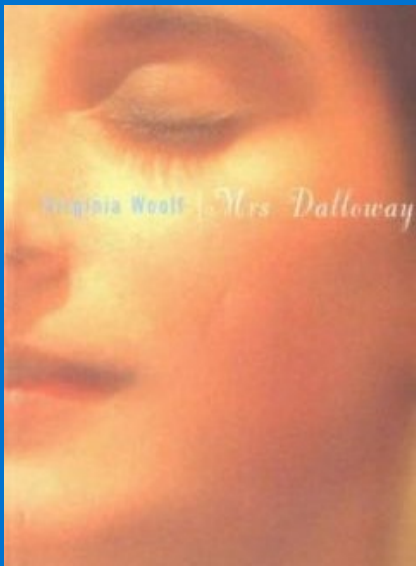
Mrs. Dalloway chronicles a June day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway—a day that is taken up with running minor errands in preparation for a party and that is punctuated, toward the end, by the suicide of a young man she has never met.

In giving an apparently ordinary day such immense resonance and significance—infusing it with the elemental conflict between death and life—Virginia Woolf triumphantly discovers her distinctive style as a novelist.

Originally published in 1925, *Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf's first complete rendering of what she described as the “luminous envelope” of consciousness: a dazzling display of the mind's inside as it plays over the brilliant surface and darker depths of reality.

Source: PenguinRandomHouse website

Mrs Dalloway

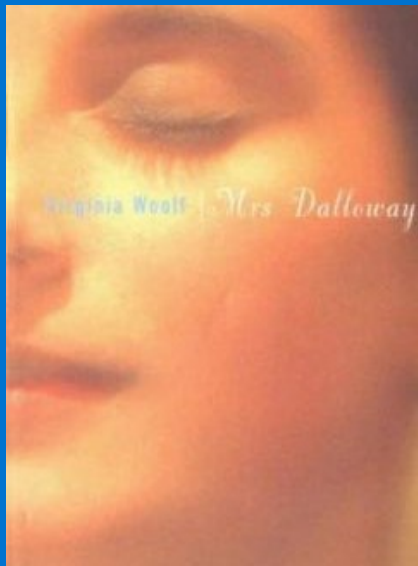


Discussion Questions

1. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf combines interior and omniscient descriptions of character and scene. How do the shifting points of view, together with that of the author, combine to create a portrait of Clarissa and her milieu?
2. Woolf saw Septimus Warren Smith as an essential counterpoint to Clarissa Dalloway. What specific comparisons and contrasts are drawn between the two? What is the significance of Septimus making his first appearance as Clarissa, from her florist's window, watches the mysterious motor car in Bond Street?
3. What was Clarissa's relationship with Sally Seton and what role does she play in Clarissa's past and in her present?
4. What is Woolf's purpose in creating a range of female characters of various ages and social classes—from Clarissa herself and Lady Millicent Burton to Sally Seton, Doris Kilman, Lucrezia Smith, and Maisie Johnson?
5. As the day and the novel proceed, the hours and half hours are sounded by a variety of clocks (for instance, Big Ben strikes noon at the novel's exact midpoint). What is the effect of the time being constantly announced on the novel's structure and on our sense of the pace of the characters' lives?

Continued overleaf

Mrs Dalloway



Discussion Questions (continued)

6. Woolf shifts scenes between past and present, primarily through memories. Did this establish for you the importance of the past as a shaping influence on, and an informing component of, the present?

7. Threats of disorder and death recur throughout the novel, culminating in Septimus's suicide and in Sir William Bradshaw's later report of that suicide at Clarissa's party. What was your response to these threats and to the final outcome?

8. Clarissa reads lines from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (IV, ii) from an open book in a shop window:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages.
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

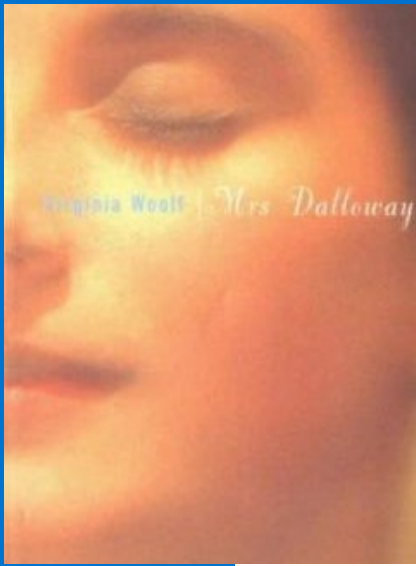
These lines are alluded to many times. What importance do they have for Clarissa, Septimus, and the novel's principal themes?

9. Why does Woolf end the novel with Clarissa as seen through Peter's eyes? Why does he experience feelings of "terror," "ecstasy," and "extraordinary excitement" in her presence? What is the significance of those feelings, and do we as readers share them?

Just for fun

10. Have you also seen the film of *Mrs Dalloway*, or *The Hours* (which is based on *Mrs Dalloway*), how did they compare to the novel? How would you dramatise or film the novel, and who would you cast in the central roles?

Mrs Dalloway



Reviews

The Perfect Hostess By John W. Crawford

Review of *Mrs. Dalloway* in *The New York Times*, May 10, 1925

“One day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, a June day in London, punctuated accurately, impersonally, unfeelingly, by the chimes of Big Ben and a fashionable party to end it, is the complete story of Mrs. Woolf's new novel, yet she contrives to enmesh all the inflections of Mrs. Dalloway's personality, and many of the implications of modern civilization, in the account of those twenty-four hours.

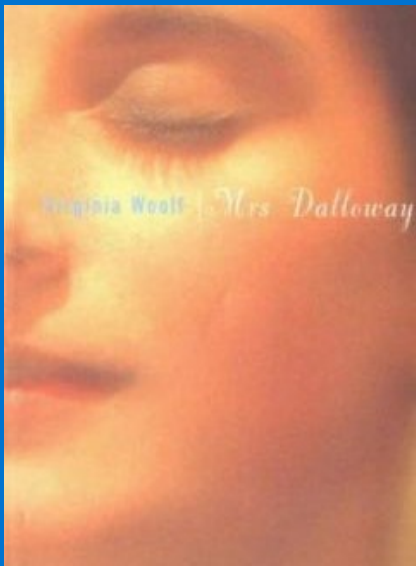
Among Mrs. Woolf's contemporaries, there are not a few who have brought to the traditional forms of fiction, and the stated modes of writing, idioms which cannot but enlarge the resources of speech and the uses of narrative. Virginia Woolf is almost alone, however, in the intricate yet clear art of her composition. Clarissa's day, the impressions she gives and receives, the memories and recognitions which stir in her, the events which are initiated remotely and engineered almost to touching distance of the impervious Clarissa, capture in a definitive matrix the drift of thought and feeling in a period, the point of view of a class, and seem almost to indicate the strength and weakness of an entire civilization.”

“When I first read it I was the same age as Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth, and every time I have read it since I have related to another woman whose age has coincided with my own. Now I am Clarissa's age, with more years behind than before me. If I am lucky I could make it to the age of Helen Parry; then her concerns would be my concerns. If Mrs Dalloway is a book of a lifetime – it is a book for a lifetime too.”

Christine Dywer Hickey, The Independent (2015)

Continued overleaf

Mrs Dalloway



Reviews (continued)

Most of my reading is rereading. Last night I opened *Mrs. Dalloway* to look up something (I thought I remembered a reference to Wagner, whom I've been thinking a lot about lately) and started to read and couldn't stop. I read until two in the morning and woke at eight to read until eleven...something I had no intention of doing. I first read *Mrs. Dalloway* when I was sixteen; and each time—this was the fourth—it has seemed like a different book. This time I thought it more extraordinary, more original, even stronger than I remembered.

Susan Sontag - author

Mrs. Dalloway was the first novel to split the atom. If the novel before *Mrs. Dalloway* aspired to immensities of scope and scale, to heroic journeys across vast landscapes, with *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf insisted that it could also locate the enormous within the everyday; that a life of errands and party-giving was every bit as viable a subject as any life lived anywhere; and that should any human act in any novel seem unimportant, it has merely been inadequately observed. The novel as an art form has not been the same since. *Mrs. Dalloway* also contains some of the most beautiful, complex, incisive and idiosyncratic sentences ever written in English, and that alone would be reason enough to read it. It is one of the most moving, revolutionary artworks of the twentieth century.

Michael Cunningham - author *The Hours*