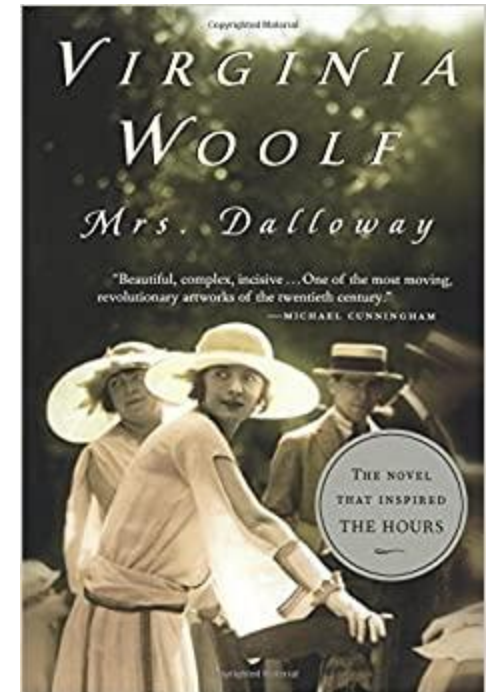


Virginia Woolf



Life-sketch of Virginia Woolf

- **Adeline Virginia Woolf (25 January 1882 – 28 March 1941) was an English writer, considered one of the most important modernist 20th-century authors and also a pioneer in the use of Stream of Consciousness as a narrative device.**

Early Life

- Woolf was born into an affluent household in South Kensington , London, the seventh child in a blended family of eight which included the modernist painter Vanessa Bell.
- Her mother was Julia Prinsep Jackson and her father Leslie Stephen(men of letters). While the boys in the family received college educations, the girls were home-schooled in English classics and Victorian literature.
- An important influence in Virginia Woolf's early life was the summer home the family used in St Ives,Cornwall, where she first saw the GODREVY Lighthouse, which was to become central in her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Later Life

- Woolf's childhood came to an abrupt end in 1895 with the death of her mother and her first mental breakdown, followed two years later by the death of her half-sister and a mother figure to her, Stella Duckworth.
- From 1897 to 1901, she attended the Ladies' Department of KING's College London, where she studied classics and history and came into contact with early reformers of Women's Higher Education and Women's Rights movement.
- Other important influences were her Cambridge-educated brothers and unfettered access to her father's vast library.

Bloomsbury Group

- Encouraged by her father, Woolf began writing professionally in 1900. Her father's death in 1904 caused another mental breakdown for Woolf. Following his death, the Stephen family moved from Kensington to the more bohemian Bloomsbury, where they adopted a free-spirited lifestyle.
- It was in Bloomsbury where, in conjunction with the brothers' intellectual friends, they formed the artistic and literary Bloomsbury Group.

The Stephens and their Bloomsbury Friends



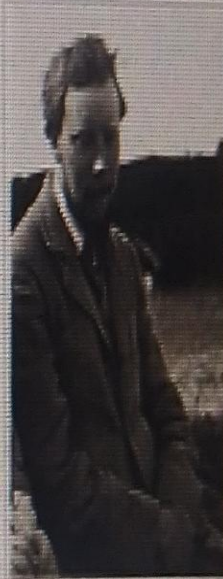
Vanessa
Stephen
1902



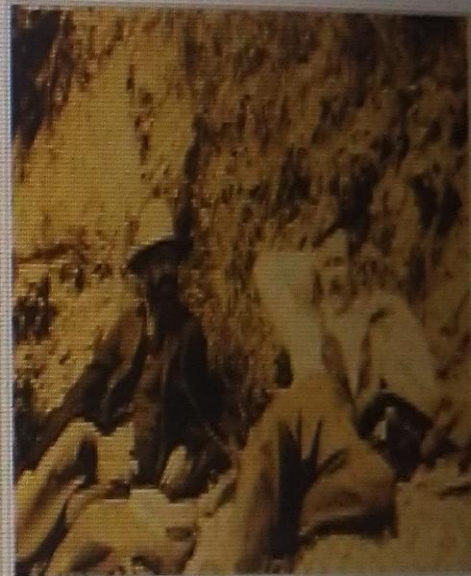
Thoby
Stephen
1902



Adrian
Stephen
Karin
Stephen
1914



Clive Bell
1910



Lytton Strachey
Sydney Saxon-Turner
1917



Desmond
MacCarthy
1912

Later Life

- In 1912, she married Leonard Woolf , and in 1917 the couple founded the Hogarth Press, which published much of her work. They rented a home in Sussex and moved there permanently in 1940. Throughout her life, Woolf was troubled by her mental illness. She was institutionalised several times and attempted suicide at least twice. Her illness may have been bipolar disorder, for which there was no effective intervention during her lifetime. In 1941, at age 59, Woolf died by drowning herself in the River Ouse at Lewes.

Her Works

- During the interwar period, Woolf was an important part of London's literary and artistic society. In 1915 she published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, through her half-brother's publishing house, Gerald Duckworth and Company. Her best-known works include the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928). She is also known for her essays, including *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which she wrote the much-quoted dictum, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."

Mrs. Dalloway

- **Mrs. Dalloway**, published in 1925, examines one day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class Londoner married to a member of Parliament.
- *Mrs. Dalloway* is essentially plotless; what action there is takes place mainly in the characters' Consciousness.
- The novel addresses the nature of time in personal experience through multiple interwoven stories, particularly that of Clarissa as she prepares for and hosts a party and that of the mentally damaged war veteran Septimus Warren Smith. The two characters can be seen as foils for each other.

Characters of Mrs. Dalloway

- **Sir William Bradshaw**

Sir William Bradshaw is a famous psychiatrist to whom Septimus' physician, Dr Holmes, refers Septimus. Bradshaw notes that Septimus has had a complete nervous breakdown and suggests spending time in the country as a cure.

- **Clarissa Dalloway**

Clarissa Dalloway is the 51-year-old protagonist of the novel. She is Richard's wife and Elizabeth's mother, and, while reminiscing about her past, spends the day organising a party that will be held that night. She is self-conscious about her role in London high society.

- **Elizabeth Dalloway**

Elizabeth Dalloway is Clarissa and Richard's 17-year-old daughter. She is said to look "oriental" and has great composure. Compared to her mother, she takes great pleasure in politics and modern history, hoping to be either a doctor or farmer in the future. She would rather spend time in the country with her father than at her mother's party.

- **Richard Dalloway**

Richard Dalloway is Clarissa's practical, "simple" husband, who feels disconnected from his wife. He is immersed in his work in government.

- **Miss Kilman**

Miss Doris Kilman, originally "Kiehlman", is Elizabeth's schoolmistress for history and is a born-again Christian. She has a degree in history and during the Great War was dismissed from her teaching job because "Miss Dolby thought she would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans".^[4] She has a German ancestry and wears an unattractive mackintosh coat because she is uninterested in dressing to please others. She dislikes Clarissa intensely but loves to spend time with Elizabeth.

Characters

- **Sally Seton**

Sally Seton is a love interest of Clarissa's, with whom she shared a kiss, who is now married to Lord Rosseter and has five boys. Sally had a strained relationship with her family and spent substantial time with Clarissa's family in her youth. She once could be described as feisty as well as a youthful ragamuffin, although she has become more conventional with age.

- **Lucrezia "Rezia" Smith**

Lucrezia "Rezia" Smith is Septimus' Italian wife. She is burdened by his mental illness and believes she is judged because of it. During most of the novel she is homesick for her family and country, which she left to marry Septimus after the Armistice.

- **Septimus Warren Smith**

Septimus Warren Smith is a World War I veteran who suffers from "[shell shock](#)" and hallucinations of his deceased friend, Evans. Educated and decorated in the war, he is detached from society and believes himself to be unable to feel. He is married to Lucrezia, from whom he has grown distant.

- **Peter Walsh**

Peter Walsh is an old friend of Clarissa's who has failed at most of his ventures in life. In the past, Clarissa rejected his marriage proposal. Now he has returned to England from India and is one of Clarissa's party guests. He plans to marry Daisy, a married woman in India, and has returned to try to arrange a divorce for his current wife.

- **Hugh Whitbread**

- Hugh Whitbread is a pompous friend of Clarissa's, who holds an unspecified position in the British Royal household. Like Clarissa, he places great importance on his place in society. Although he believes he is an essential member of the British aristocracy, Lady Bruton, Clarissa, Richard, and Peter find him obnoxious.

Narration of the Novel

- The novel's narration is third-person omniscient, but it changes its focus throughout. The narrative begins and ends with Clarissa as it details a day in her life. Clarissa is a seemingly disillusioned socialite whose mood fluctuates: at some moments she seems delighted, at others she seems depressed. Her overall affect suggests suppressed symptoms of depression.

Summary

- *Mrs. Dalloway* begins with Clarissa's preparatory errand to buy flowers. Unexpected events occur—a car emits an explosive noise and a plane writes in the sky—and incite different reactions in different people. Soon after she returns home, her former lover Peter arrives. The two converse, and it becomes clear that they still have strong feelings for each other. In a moment of shared vulnerability, Peter asks Clarissa if she is happy. Before Clarissa can answer, her daughter, Elizabeth, interrupts them.

Summary

- Perspectives switch, and the narrator inhabits Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran suffering from shell shock (post-traumatic stress disorder). He is waiting with his wife, Lucrezia, to see a psychiatrist named Sir William Bradshaw. The reader is informed that Septimus has been suffering greatly since returning from the war, and his suffering is something the other characters are unable to grasp.

Summary

- The perspective shifts to Richard, Clarissa's husband. In a fit of passion, Richard wants to run home and tell Clarissa he loves her. However, he finds himself unable to do more than give her flowers. Clarissa acknowledges that she respects the gulf between herself and Richard, as it gives both of them freedom and independence while also relieving them of paying attention to certain aspects of life.

Summary

- The novel's perspective shifts back to Septimus, who has been told that he is to be taken to a psychiatric hospital. Septimus would rather die than see himself inside such a place, so he throws himself out of a window and becomes impaled on a fence.

Summary

- The narration then switches to Clarissa's perspective again, this time during her party. She is primarily concerned with entertaining her guests, some of whom are very esteemed. Sir William Bradshaw arrives with his wife, who announces that Septimus has killed himself. Clarissa, though at first annoyed that Mrs. Bradshaw would discuss such a topic at a party, is soon ruminating on Septimus's situation. In a small room, by herself, she identifies with how overwhelmed Septimus must have felt. She respects him for choosing death over compromising the integrity of his soul by allowing it to be confined. In light of what he did to preserve his soul, she feels ashamed of the ways she has compromised her own soul in order to go on living. Thus chastened, she returns to the party as it is winding down.

Form And Context

- ***Mrs. Dalloway* may be best known for Woolf's use of stream of consciousness narrative, which was particularly influenced by James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Many critics believe that, in writing this novel, Woolf found her voice, which she further refined in her following novels. Her style was a reaction to the narrative style of much popular Victorian literature, which was linear and deterministic.**
- **Woolf, like many other Modernist authors writing in the aftermath of World War I, felt that such a style did not truly depict life as the disjointed mess that it was. She drew from both Joyce's and Marcel Proust's understanding of time and psychology to develop round, dynamic characters that convincingly express the reality of their existence on the page.**
- **Mental illness is a common theme in Woolf's novels, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is no exception. Shell shock (PTSD) was not examined closely during Woolf's time; rather, it was seen as a blanket diagnosis pertaining to any and all residual mental effects of war. Woolf, through Septimus, forces the reader to engage with shell shock firsthand and to grapple with the internal and external effects it can have. This was something few authors had done before. Woolf herself struggled with bouts of mental illness throughout her life, and some believe that Clarissa's character was meant to be autobiographical.**

Interpretation

- *Mrs. Dalloway*, through its depiction of Clarissa and Septimus, who can be seen as foils for each other, and of the political atmosphere in Britain during the 1920s, explores the fragmented yet fluid nature of time and the interconnectedness of perception and reality across individuals and social spheres. Clarissa, a woman of high society, is primarily concerned with giving a good party—perhaps as a means of affirming life and fending off death. When news of Septimus's death is interjected into her party, she is annoyed, as it might dampen everyone's spirits. She appears at times to be concerned only with the surfaces of things, but her seeming disillusionment with reality can be understood as a coping mechanism. Clarissa tries to ignore the uncomfortable realities of her surroundings—the residual horrors of World War I and her own implied mental illness—and instead engages at the superficial level of societal rules and expectations

Clarrisa's Thoughts

- Septimus was unable to live with the idea of confinement. So he chooses death. Clarissa does not face the same sort of confinement, but her freedom is shown at times to be an illusion. She does not commit suicide of the body, but, by shielding herself from uncomfortable realities, she commits emotional suicide, some critics argue. However, Clarissa's identification with Septimus at the end of the novel also implies that she is somewhat aware of the limits on her freedom. It also seems to relieve her of her disillusionment, if only momentarily, as she praises Septimus for having the courage to escape the confinement that she sees in her own life despite her efforts to ignore it.