

# **Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway**

**Discipline Courses-I**

**Semester-I**

**Paper 12: British Literature: The Early 20 th C entury**

**Lesson: Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway**

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# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

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## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway



Virginia Woolf (Wikipedia)

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Woolf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Woolf)

### Biography

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1882. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), was a well-known historian, author and critic. He was the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, a work which would have a significant impact on Woolf's biographies. Her mother Julia Stephen (1846–1895) was born in India to Dr. John and Maria Jackson. She later moved to England with her mother.

Virginia grew up in 22 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, London, in an erudite setting. Her parents were cultured and well-connected. The household was large, for both her father and her mother had been married before and been widowed. Virginia had two half-brothers Gerald and George from her mother's first marriage to Herbert Duckworth, and a half-sister Stella whom she loved dearly. Her father had one daughter Laura by his first wife Harriet (who was the daughter of William Thackeray). Laura was mentally ill and was institutionalized in 1891 for the rest of her life. Leslie and Julia had four children together: Vanessa (born 1879), Julian (Thoby) (1880), Virginia (1882), and Adrian (1883).

Writing was a passion for the young Virginia, perhaps because it gave her a sense of connection with her family, especially her father. She longed to be the chosen one, amusing

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her father with a story every night. This established a family tradition of story-telling, taken forward largely by Virginia who wrote stories and Vanessa who painted pictures for the *Hyde Park Gate News*, a newspaper which the Stephen children produced weekly for their parents, between 1891 and 1895.

Julia Stephen died of rheumatic fever in 1895. Virginia visited her mother as she was dying, and she said, "Hold yourself straight, my little Goat." Her mother's death triggered Virginia's first major breakdown. For many years, her half-brothers George and Gerald subjected Virginia to some highly damaging sexual abuse (which Woolf recalls in her autobiographical essays *A Sketch of the Past* and *22 Hyde Park Gate*). Virginia was further traumatised by the loss of her half-sister Stella in 1897.

The Stephen children were brought up in a milieu which was filled with the influence of Victorian literary society. Among those who visited the house were literary stalwarts like Henry James, George Henry Lewes, and Virginia's honorary godfather, James Russell Lowell. Julia's aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, the photographer, was also a visitor to the Stephen household. In addition to these influences, there was a huge library at the Stephens' house. While Virginia and Vanessa were taught the classics and English literature at home, their brothers Adrian and Thoby were formally educated and sent to Cambridge. However, it was still intellectually stimulating to come in contact with their brothers' Cambridge friends, who also visited the house.



**Figure : 2**

**Source :**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Burne\\_Jones\\_Princess\\_Sabra\\_Led\\_to\\_the\\_Dragon.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Burne_Jones_Princess_Sabra_Led_to_the_Dragon.jpg)

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Julia Stephen portrayed by Edward Burne-Jones, 1866; from Wikipedia

Virginia took some courses of study in Greek, Latin, German and history at the Ladies' Department of King's College, London between 1897 and 1901. Since women's education was still a matter of reform, it helped her to be in touch with some of the early reformers of women's higher education such as Clara Pater, George Warr and Lilian Faithfull. Vanessa also studied Latin, Italian, art and architecture at King's Ladies' Department and later went on to study painting at the Royal Academy.

Virginia's first published work was a journalistic piece about Haworth, home of the Brontë family, which appeared in 1900 in the *Times Literary Supplement*. She was a prolific writer and was to continue her journalistic writings throughout her life.

The death of her father in 1904 provoked Virginia's most severe breakdown, and she was institutionalised briefly. The trauma of abuse could not be healed and Virginia continued to have recurrent breakdowns alternating with depressive periods.

In 1907 Vanessa married Clive Bell, and subsequently became well known as a painter.



Figure 3

Vanessa Bell

**Source:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roger\\_Fry\\_Vanessa\\_Bell.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roger_Fry_Vanessa_Bell.jpg)

Virginia Stephen married writer Leonard Woolf – whom she once referred to as a “penniless Jew” – on 10 August 1912. Their marriage was happy (see box). The two also collaborated

### Virginia and Leonard

When Leonard Woolf proposed, Virginia hesitated, partly due to her fear of marriage and the emotional and sexual involvement it entails. She wrote to Leonard: "As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock. And yet your caring for me as you do almost overwhelms me. It is so real, and so strange." She eventually accepted him, and they married in August 1912. On medical advice, they did not have children.

Years later, in 1937, Virginia wrote in her diary: "Love-making—after 25 years can't bear to be separate ... you see it is enormous pleasure being wanted: a wife. And our marriage so complete."

professionally. In 1917 they founded the Hogarth Press, which subsequently published Virginia's novels as well as works by T.S. Eliot, Laurens van der Post, and others. The Press also commissioned works by contemporary artists such as Dora Carrington and Vanessa Bell. It played a leading role in disseminating the ideas of Sigmund Freud in the English language.



**Figure 4:** A portrait of Woolf by Roger Fry c. 1917

**Source :** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roger\\_Fry\\_-\\_Virginia\\_Woolf.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Roger_Fry_-_Virginia_Woolf.jpg)

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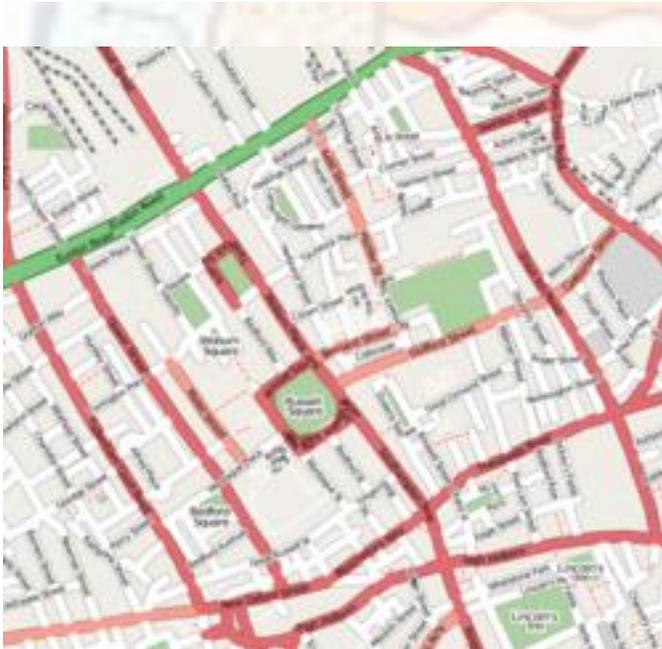
Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915. The publisher was Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd, owned by her half-brother.

Throughout her life, Woolf remained close to her surviving siblings, Vanessa and Adrian; Thoby had died of an illness at the age of 26.

On 28 March 1941, Virginia Woolf committed suicide by drowning herself in the river Ouse, after filling her pockets with stones.

### Bloomsbury

After their father's death in 1904, Virginia and her siblings moved to Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. During this period, Virginia started teaching English literature and history at an adult-education college in London. It was also during this time that she became close friends with young men who shared and stimulated her intellectual interests – mostly friends of her brother Thoby from Cambridge – including her future husband Leonard Woolf



as well as Clive Bell and Lytton Strachey. This group started meeting for 'Thursday Evenings' at the Stephens' house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury in 1906. Soon after, Vanessa – who married Clive Bell in 1907 – started a 'Friday Club,' to discuss the arts, and the unofficial 'Bloomsbury Group' took off. Other members of the group included John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Roger Fry.

**Figure :5**

Source : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bloomsbury\\_-\\_map\\_1.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bloomsbury_-_map_1.png)

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The Bloomsbury Group was a small, informal group of writers, artists and intellectuals who lived and worked in the West Central 1 district of London known as Bloomsbury. (Map of Bloomsbury, Wikipedia)

Although the group had no rules or agenda, their intellectual exchanges were a major influence on work done later by individual members, who were all to become famous in their respective fields. It is not as if all members were in full agreement on all subjects. Indeed, some of Bloomsbury's most stimulating ideas and writings were born out of internal disagreement. The group was not overtly political, but it is perhaps safe to say that each member of Bloomsbury was leftist in his or her politics.

The ethos of the Bloomsbury group was such that it encouraged a liberal approach to sexuality. In 1922 Virginia Woolf met the writer and gardener Vita Sackville-West, wife of Harold Nicolson. After a tentative start, they began an

intimate relationship, and remained friends until Woolf's death in 1941.

### Virginia, Vita and *Orlando*

In 1928, Woolf presented Sackville-West with *Orlando*, a fantastical novel subtitled 'a biography', in which the hero's life spans three centuries and both sexes. Nigel Nicolson, Vita Sackville-West's son, wrote "The effect of Vita on Virginia is all contained in *Orlando*, the longest and most charming love letter in literature, in which she explores Vita, weaves her in and out of the centuries, tosses her from one sex to the other, plays with her, dresses her in furs, lace and emeralds, teases her, flirts with her, drops a veil of mist around her".

### Letters to Vita

#### From Virginia to Vita (1927)

Look here Vita — throw over your man, and we'll go to Hampton Court and dine on the river together and walk in the garden in the moonlight and come home late and have a bottle of wine and get tipsy, and I'll tell you all the things I have in my head, millions, myriads — They won't stir by day, only by dark on the river. Think of that. Throw over your man, I say, and come.

#### From Vita to Virginia (1927)

...I am reduced to a thing that wants Virginia. I composed a beautiful letter to you in the sleepless nightmare hours of the night, and it has all gone: I just miss you, in a quite simple desperate human way. You, with all your undumb letters, would never write so elementary a phrase as that; perhaps you wouldn't even feel it. And yet I believe you'll be sensible of a little gap. But you'd clothe it in so exquisite a phrase that it should lose a little of its reality. Whereas with me it is quite stark: I miss you even more than I could have believed; and I was prepared to miss you a good deal. So this letter is really just a squeal of pain. It is incredible how essential to me you have become. I suppose you are accustomed to people saying these things. Damn you, spoilt creature; I shan't make you love me any more by giving myself away like this — But oh my dear, I can't be clever and stand-offish with you: I love you too much for that. Too truly. You have no idea how stand-offish I can be with people I don't love. I have brought it to a fine art. But you have broken down my defenses. And I don't really resent it.

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## The Twentieth Century Novel

The English novel acquired its modern form in the first half of the eighteenth century. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* was an epistolary novel written in 1740, told in the form of letters. The works of Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne established the novel as a genre.

The nineteenth century was upheld by writers like Jane Austen, who eschewed the eighteenth-century sensationalism. In *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Emma* and other works, she expressed a largely social concern, a detailed study of the respectable English country society. Austen died in 1817, and thirty years later Charlotte Bronte wrote *Jane Eyre* and her sister Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*, which showed that the novel of terror could be used to heighten a human story of passion without any trace of absurdity.

With Charles Dickens, born in 1812, the novel entered a new phase. He concentrated on complex themes, especially the painful experiences of his youth in London, such as in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. For Dickens, fiction was a platform for social reform. Other major novelists are William Thackeray, in whose novels plot is subordinated to the philosophy of life and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), who wrote philosophical dissertations on current topics. Thomas Hardy had his own claim to fame as a poet and novelist. Henry James is considered one of the most important of the late Victorian novelists.

The rapid changes caused by the First World War with their attendant upheaval in social conditions accelerated the development of the novel to a point where it was beginning to be questioned if it could go any further in its present format. With Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, we enter a time of deliberate exploration of the subconscious recesses of the human mind.

The Britannica Online defines the **psychological novel** as "a work of fiction in which the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters are of equal or greater interest than is the external action of the narrative. In a psychological novel the emotional reactions and internal states of the characters are influenced by and in turn trigger external events in a meaningful symbiosis."

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Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is perhaps the prime early example of emphasis on the inner life of characters in dramatic form. Although some early English novels such as *Pamela* and *Tristram Shandy* do adopt a psychological approach, the psychological novel reached its full potential only in the 20th century. Coincidentally, it was during this period that the discipline of psychology grew, and the importance of the working of the mind was established by Sigmund Freud.

The psychological novel keeps the character central. Plot is relegated to a subordinate role. Events may not appear in chronological order, but rather as they occur in the character's free associations, memories, fantasies and dreams. For instance, in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* the entire action of the novel is set within a single day, while associations evoked by the events take the reader back and forth through the characters' past and present lives.

### Woolf and Modernism

The term **modernism** is applied to a movement that took place in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, across all the creative arts, especially poetry, fiction, drama, painting, music and architecture. Modernism was marked by the influence of major thinkers like Darwin, Marx, Freud and Einstein. Characteristics of modernism include a break with traditions and a preoccupation with the inner self and consciousness.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) put forward the idea that living beings evolve and new species come into existence. By challenging the Biblical idea of creation as well as the privileged status of humans, Darwin's theory of evolution undermined the certainty that characterised much of pre-modern thought.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) articulated a new social and economic philosophy, based on the ideas of base and superstructure, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and class conflict for control over means of production. He propounded the theory of utopia: "from

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) revolutionized science with the Special Theory of Relativity, and made major contributions to Quantum Mechanics, which is central to the understanding of the fundamental constitution of matter. Together, these developments undermined the mechanistic world-view of 19<sup>th</sup> century science.

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Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) founded the discipline of psychoanalysis. He laid emphasis on the unconscious and developed the technique of free association, the theory of the Oedipus complex and his interpretation of dreams. 'Freud called Psychoanalysis 'the talking cure' and also said that 'the unconscious is structured like a language.'

In the history of literature, Modernism is more than a movement. It is one of the deepest and most intense upheavals ever to have occurred. In the words of Carter and McRae, "It reflects a shift in knowledge and understanding, in sensibility and expression", as the world entered a period of rapid change in all spheres of human activity. They add: "To attempt to classify modernism in a few words would be impossible. Every individual voice made its own contribution to the modern in literature as in all the other forms of artistic expression." (368-369) Lyn Pykett observes that "In the twentieth century, 'the modern' and 'modernism' have come to a stand for 'a particular set of practices and ideologies of representation' as well as 'a specific historical experience'." (159)

The roots of the modernist movement in literature can be traced back to the 1890s, but it is really after the First World War that the modern came into its own. In 1922, for example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* appeared in book form, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* was published, and Virginia Woolf found her own voice with *Jacob's Room*.

In 1924, when literary modernism could be said to be at its peak, Virginia Woolf wrote an essay entitled 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in which she tried to account for what was new about "modern" fiction. An earlier version had appeared under the title 'Modern Novels' in the *Times Literary Supplement* in April 1919. Her famous statement in this essay was that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed", the implication being that modern fiction had to find new ways to describe character. Describing it as a "manifesto of literary modernism", Makiko Minow-Pinkney points out that, by 1919, "four volumes of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* had been published (Woolf reviewed the fourth, *The Tunnel*, in February 1919) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* had appeared in instalments in The

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Little Review. May Sinclair had published a full assessment of Richardson's novels, using, probably for the first time in a literary context, the term stream-of-consciousness."

Woolf may have chosen the year 1910 because the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition, organised by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, was held from November 1910 to January 1911. It introduced the English public to recent developments in the visual arts. Her remark was, of course, tongue-in-cheek. Nevertheless, it is true that rapid social and political changes overtook England soon after the death of Edward VII in May 1910.



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### **Virginia Woolf as a Novelist**

Virginia Woolf's major novels are *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928) and *The Waves* (1931). England was majorly affected by the First World War. Poets and novelists could not keep away from their lives the meaninglessness that came at the turn of the century, and especially after the War. As Matthew Arnold had put it, "The sea of faith was dry", and with the advent of science, belief and relationships stood shaken. Psychoanalysis had begun to stand on its feet and Freud had given one of the first principles of 'the talking cure'. Freud and Woolf had in common a deep interest in the workings of the human mind, though, as Julia Briggs remarks, "Freud approached it through observation and analysis, while Woolf apprehended its workings through the very flight of the mind itself, through acts of re-creation and imagination." For both, the nature of memory and its elusive workings were crucial. A major theme of Woolf's fiction was to be the radical difference between the "modern" world and the "Edwardian" one.

Woolf's novels bear a satiric brush and, at the same time, carry a denunciation of the English social system. The bonds of communication among people are damaged by the emotional strain of modern life. Her claim that around 1910, human character changed signified a loss of values of life and personal relationships which had suffered a serious blow. This state of disorder is expressed in Woolf's novels through her characters' inability to communicate with one another.

As Joan Bennett points out, "in her first two books she takes the basic principles of the novel as she finds them and adapts them to her own vision. Characters are described and then gradually made better known to us by their sayings and doings; they are related to one another by a series of events leading to a climax. Each book is a love story. Yet it is clear that it is not the width and variety of the human comedy, nor the idiosyncrasies of human character that interest her. Rather it is the deep and simple experiences, love, happiness, beauty, loneliness, death. Again and again in these two books what the reader feels is not so much "this man or this woman would have felt like that in those circumstances," but rather "Yes, that is how it feels to be in love; to be happy; to be desolate."" (3)

According to Michael Whitworth, "The aeroplane scene in *Mrs Dalloway* combines many of the perspectives relevant to Virginia Woolf's modernism: technological, social and literary.

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As 'Einstein' suggests, modernist literature responded to radical intellectual developments in philosophy and science. In 1911, as Leonard Woolf recalled, 'Freud and Rutherford and Einstein' had begun to revolutionise our knowledge of our minds and of the universe. As the aeroplane suggests, modernism was also a response to technological innovation, particularly in the urban environment." The distinction between psychological time and clock time underlies the modernist experiments with time and form.

### **Bergson's ideas on Time**

**Henri-Louis Bergson** (1859-1941) was a major French philosopher, who applied Freud's theories and methods onto society and everyday life.

Bergson argued that reality was characterised by the unique experience of time in the mind of the individual (Childs 49). He used the term 'psychological time' to refer to this experience of time. Psychological time, according to Bergson, is not a different type of time, but a different manner of perceiving time. Psychological time is not subjected to chronology or linearity. It is concerned with memory, expectation, duration, extension, compression, and association; it moves in flux and is highly subjective. These characteristics make it difficult to pin down and even more difficult to represent in art and literature.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible."

While Henri Bergson and his theories on psychological time had a great influence on Modernist art, there is no evidence that Virginia Woolf ever actually read Bergson. Nevertheless, the influence of modern thinkers, such as Bergson, can be discerned in her work. In *Orlando*, published in 1928, Woolf voices her fascination with the contrast between clock time and psychological time:

"The time of man works with strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer elements of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented by the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation."

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## Woolf as a Feminist

In her childhood Virginia Woolf was not given the same formal education as her brothers, who were sent to Cambridge to study. She resented this discrimination all her life. As Woolf began to write literary criticism, she could not ignore gender difference and a distinct feminist tradition of writing. She was also concerned with the question of women's equality with men in marriage, and she vividly evoked the inequality of her own parents' marriage through the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Woolf's novels depict the despair and loneliness of women's lives that have been shaped by the moral, ideological and conventional framework of contemporary English society. Arguably, her vision was of an androgynous world, in which there is a balance between intellect and emotion. There are, in her novels, women characters who signify hope in this world, such as Elizabeth in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Lily in *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf put forward her thesis on the subject of Women and Fiction in an extended essay *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929. In it she imagines the fate of Shakespeare's equally brilliant sister Judith (in fact Shakespeare's sister was called Joan). Unable to receive any formal education, Judith would have been forced to marry or pushed to abandon her literary capabilities. Woolf asks: "Who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?" In the end Judith kills herself. Woolf asserts that for a feminist writing, where one wrote from the woman's point of view, the lyric poet Sappho should also be recognized and given space. For Woolf it is important to see "that the great female authors wrote as women write, not as men write". She says: "Lamb, Browne, Thackeray, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey – whoever it may be – never helped a woman yet, though she may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use." She celebrates matrilineage: "We think back through our mothers if we are women". Woolf herself thinks back through Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, and through them to Aphra Behn. In the end Woolf declares that the best writers – in whom she includes Shakespeare, Austen and Proust – are androgynous. Woolf appreciates the need for women's friendship and continues to insist on the importance of women's solidarity against patriarchal machinery. She comments: "Masterpieces are not single and solitary births, they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body, so that the experience of mass is behind the single voice."

As Lyn Pykett points out, Woolf constantly focussed on the connections between gender and writing. She discussed writing in gendered terms and, on occasions (although by no means

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consistently), asserted a belief in the necessity to engender a new kind of fiction by gendering writing differently.

In 1938, Woolf wrote another book-length essay, *Three Guineas*, which deals, on the one hand, with the issue of war and how to prevent it, and on the other, with women's education and employment. As J. B. Batchelor notes in his essay 'Feminism in Virginia Woolf' it attracted adverse comments from contemporaries, such as Forster: "... he finds feminism responsible for the worst of her books – the cantankerous *Three Guineas* and for the less successful streaks in *Orlando*. ...He admires *A Room of One's Own* but feels that there is something old fashioned about her subsequent concern with the status of women."

In a recent book *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, Naomi Black has re-assessed *Three Guineas*. Rather than a book mainly about war, Black considers it to be the clearest presentation of Woolf's feminism, and a major feminist document. Woolf's argument – that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the basis for transformative social change – was well ahead of its time.

In summary, we may quote again from *A Room of One's Own*: "Literature is open to everybody. I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to run me off the grass. Lock up your liberties if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no blot that can set upon the freedom of my mind."

### **The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: The Theories of Freud**

Freud laid the foundations of psychoanalysis with his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1899. In his essay 'The theory of dreams' which is a short version of the book, he describes how sleep is a condition of repose without stimuli. This could be threatened by external stimuli during sleep, by the interests of the day which have not been yet resolved, and unsatisfied, repressed impulses ready to seek expression.

According to Freud, dreams give us "our first glimpse into those processes which go on in our unconscious mental system and show us that they are quite different from what we know about our conscious thought. ... We hardly dare call them "thought processes" – at work in the formation of neurotic symptoms as have turned the latent dream thoughts into the manifest dream."(83)

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"Displacement is the chief method employed in the process of dream-distortion, which the dream thoughts have to undergo under the influence of the censorship."(87) The term displacement refers to the redirection of a drive, emotion, preoccupation or behaviour from its initial or natural object to another, because the original direction is for some reason anxiety-ridden.

Condensation is another defence mechanism. Those elements of the dream-thoughts that have any point of contact are *condensed* into new unities. As Freud asserts: "As a result of condensation one element in a manifest dream may correspond to a number of elements in the dream-thoughts; but conversely one of the elements from the dream-thoughts may be represented by a number of pictures in the dream." (86)

One of the key ideas that emerged from Freud's early writings is that of the Oedipus complex. The term gets its name from a Greek mythological character Oedipus, who unwittingly kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. A play based on the myth, *Oedipus the King*, was written by Sophocles, around 430 BC. In the play, Oedipus' crime is gradually discovered, and he blinds himself in self-punishment. The play, in Freud's words, "portrays the gradual discovery of the deed of Oedipus, long since accomplished, and brings it slowly to light by skilfully prolonged enquiry, constantly fed by new evidence; it has thus a certain resemblance to the course of a psycho-analysis. In the dialogue, the deluded mother/wife, Jocasta resists the continuation of the enquiry; she points out that many people in their dreams have mated with their mothers, but that dreams are of no account."(90)

Freud said that in the life of every little boy there is a stage in which the mother is the primary love-object. Of the mythical Oedipus, he says: "His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours — because the Oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so."

In his later writings, Freud made a three-way distinction along the structure of the unconscious. He claimed that the conscious was the tip of the iceberg. He went on to say: "Everything unconscious that behaves in this way, that can easily exchange the unconscious condition for the conscious one, is therefore better described as "capable of entering

## Oedipus Complex

Laplanche and Pontalis define it as “Organised body of loving and hostile wishes which the child experiences towards its parents.” As in Sophocles’ tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, there is a “desire of the death of the rival – the parent of the same sex – and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex. According to Freud, the peak period for the experience of the Oedipus Complex lies between the ages of three and five years, that is, during the phallic stage; its decline signals into the latency period.” (282-283)

consciousness” or as preconscious. ... There are other mental processes or mental material which have no easy access to consciousness, but which must be inferred, discovered into conscious form in the manner that has been described. It is for such material that we reserve the name of the unconscious proper.”(98)

Freud put forward a three-way structure of the psyche, comprising the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id is the unorganized part of the personality structure that contains a person’s basic, instinctual drives. Governed by the pleasure principle, the id is, in Freud’s words, “.... a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement.”(99) The ego acts according to the reality principle; i.e. it seeks to please the id’s drive in realistic ways that will benefit the individual in the long term. The super-ego works in contradiction to the id. The super-ego strives to act in a socially appropriate manner, whereas the id just wants instant self-gratification. The super-ego controls our sense of right and wrong and guilt. It helps us fit into society by getting us to act in socially acceptable ways.

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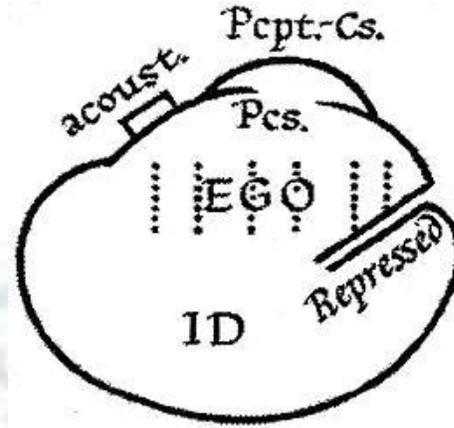


Figure :6

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Structural-Model1.png>

### Psychoanalysis and Virginia Woolf

In this section of the lesson, we focus on relating the text to the mental life (both normal and abnormal) of the author. The text is viewed as a modified form of free association. In the section on *Mrs Dalloway*, the text is considered in its own right, and a thematic analysis is carried out, identifying traces or derivatives of mental contents. In part, we also treat the novel as a case history, ignoring the as-if nature of the literary text and performing a type of character analysis.

Virginia Woolf's patienthood cannot be ignored even though it did not affect her creative genius. She writes about perpetual violence and repeated loss – the first being the pre-oedipal loss of her mother at a tender age of thirteen. Later, she also lost her half sister Stella, to whom she was very close.

As discussed earlier, she had several mental "breakdowns". It may be relevant to add, as D.W Winnicott has pointed out, that when we understand a nervous "breakdown" happening, the breakdown is already over. The patient may then experience a high level of creativity or excitement, or serious bouts of depression. Virginia's narcissistic self led to intense fits of rage, and she had severe mood swings without any apparent trigger. This would be followed by intense bouts of depression. The "spasmodic force of the

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unconscious", as Julia Kristeva calls it, took over entirely and she fell back into pre oedipal or imaginary chaos.

She idealized her mother completely and could not distance herself from her. Julia too could not allow Virginia to remain absorbed with her own self, because she needed all the attention herself. According to Margaret Mahler, enjoying earthly sensations and tolerating feelings of loss of self, the mother must be an ego mother, in tune with her baby's excitement in exploring, touching, and reaching out to the world. Otherwise, the child's separation individuation becomes extremely difficult and this ambivalence colours her perceptions as it does in Virginia's case, because of the magnetic pull of her mother.

Virginia's mood swings were more defensively sublimated into writing, keeping the madness intact. That brings us closer to two things about her psyche: her narcissism and a deep sado-masochistic need for punishment. In *On Narcissism* (1915) Freud conceptualized the question of energy directed at the self versus energy directed at others, called cathexis. In *A Sketch of the Past* Woolf writes, "There was a small looking glass. I only did it if I was sure that I were alone. I was ashamed of it. By standing on tiptoe, I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven I got into this habit of looking at my face in the glass." She moves on to observing that she was tomboyish and her mother and her step sister Stella were beautiful. This is where I first see envy, a wish to be like the mother, the object of her father's affections. The memory of her grandfather smoking a cigar makes her feel that what she has inherited from her grandfather and her mother, also gives her a sense of shame, a sense of being puritan.

In her narcissism, then, she touches on the anxiety about how she should write about herself and her desire "to live her life from the start". She doesn't want to write like others do. Her concern was on how she "was ... different from other people". Whether as "ugly or stupid, passionate, cold", but she must be different. "I have never been able to compare my gifts and defects with other people." How do we understand this wish for uniqueness, for after all she has descended from 'a great many people'? Her intense communications through the many letters she wrote, her varied reading and her novels articulate her world.

Narcissism is followed by guilt. The line "My natural love for beauty was checked by some ancestral dread" does not go deep enough into what the dread could be. This time she has an explanation – abuse by her step brother. Indeed she finds Gerald Duckworth's advances

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repelling, and her repulsion also expresses the more distressing effect of a consciousness of paternal and also maternal sexuality. Loss of innocence imposed upon her body was shocking enough to sponsor a violent unconscious refusal of the body itself in her. In fact, Woolf herself does not seem too convinced by her own answer to her sense of shame and dread. What follows the image in the glass is a dream of the horrible face of an animal.

It is important to understand Woolf's attitude towards food. She was prescribed food and rest for long periods when sent down to George Duckworth's country residence Dalingridge Palace. She would protest severely by not eating, and punish her body. Perhaps this was the guilt about sexuality; her anger directed from sex to food. Her anorexia is a refusal of the body. She punished her body by not eating and this too is her masochism, a kind of sadism directed towards the self.

As the critic Barbara Claire Freeman discusses, Woolf sets up a complex relationship between beating, writing and compulsion. In *A Sketch of the Past*, writing has the symbolic valence of beating, and functions at the level of language in the same ways as beating functions upon the body. Woolf calls her everyday life moments of non-being, a kind of cotton wool, behind which is hidden a pattern. Woolf's moments mean moments of being beaten up by life. The pain brings with it the knowledge that a rupture becomes a form of a revelation, and words must take the form of blows.

Walter Benjamin talks about the shock experience whereas Woolf suggests that it is the capacity for receiving shock and "not the shock experience" itself that motivates her writing. "The battle is at its crisis. It comes closer to this house daily ... But I wish to go on, not to settle down in that dismal puddle."

I would like to refer to Freud's paper "A child is being beaten". According to Freud:

... the first phase of beating phantasies among girls, then, must belong to a very early period of childhood. The child being beaten is never the one producing the phantasy, but is invariably another child, most often a brother or a sister if there is any. This first phase of the beating phantasy is therefore completely represented by the phrase: '*My father is beating the child*'. I am betraying a great deal of what is to be brought forward later when instead of this I say '*My father is beating the child whom I hate*'. Profound transformations have taken place between the first phase and the next, It is true that the person beating remains the same (i.e. the father);

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but now the child who is beaten has been changed into another one and is now invariably the child producing the phantasy. The phantasy is accompanied by a high degree of pleasure. Now therefore the wording runs: '*I am being beaten by my father*'.

Freud adds that: "if the child in question is a younger brother or sister, it is despised and hated: yet it attracts to itself the share of affection, and this is a spectacle the sight of which cannot be avoided. One soon learns that being beaten, even if it does not hurt very much, signifies a deprivation of love and a humiliation. It means my father does not love this other child, he loves only me." The pleasure attaching to this phantasy is both sadistic and masochistic.

Masochism is fundamentally an expression of forbidden sexual desire, and it eroticises power differentials modelled on those between father and child. This equation of masochism with oedipal sexuality has long been reinforced by both Freudian and Lacanian traditions. So this is the masochistic pleasure derived from being the chosen one negatively.

Mourning and Melancholia are also central to the life and works of Virginia Woolf. The statement made by Woolf to the effect that writing *To the Lighthouse* was a "necessary act" to rid her of her obsession with her dead parents is significant. This is the way she could sublimate her grief into writing, this became her mourning.

In a 1990 book *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Elizabeth Abel examines the work of Virginia Woolf against the background of the debates that were going on in psychoanalytic circles during the 1920s, when Woolf did her most important writing. Woolf's engagement with psychoanalysis, Abel states, 'was deeply embedded in history'.

Analyzing *A Room of One's Own*, Abel shows that Woolf's idea of androgyny suggests not the coming together of opposites, but female fertilized by female. There is little sense of sexual polarity. Beneath the celebration of mothers and matrilineage, she sees an undercurrent of unsatisfied hunger, and of anger toward them. The fantasized legacy from an aunt, of five hundred pounds a year 'for ever', fulfils the wish for sustenance, Abel observes:

"But even the fantasy enacts, rather than resolving, the dynamic of hunger and anger, for it is Woolf herself who must murder the aunt to gratify her narrator's desire. Although

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hedged with irony, the narrator's acknowledgement that 'this writing of books by women ... leads to the murder of one's aunts' articulates one of the text's most profound unconscious fears: that the daughter's hunger will annihilate the mother." (102)

### **Virginia Woolf meets Sigmund Freud**

The relation between Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud is very important. In 1914, Leonard Woolf had discovered Freud and recognized his genius. He wrote the first non-technical article on his work in English – a review of *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) for the *New Weekly*. Leonard also read *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and commented on Freud's "great subtlety of mind, a broad and sweeping imagination more characteristic of the poet than the scientist". Virginia was between her most serious psychotic states at this time, and Leonard may not have shared his discovery with her. Virginia made no mention of Freud in her letters at that time.

In early March 1924 the Woolfs moved to 52 Tavistock Square and installed the Hogarth Press in the large basement there. Around the same time, James Strachey, who translated Freud's works, asked Leonard and Virginia if the Press would publish the International Psycho-Analytical Library, including Freud's *Collected Papers* in four volumes. They agreed, though Virginia expressed reservations in her letters. Volumes I and II of the *Collected Papers* were published before the end of 1924. During the same period, Virginia was writing *Mrs Dalloway*, which was published on 14 May 1925.

Virginia Woolf and Sigmund Freud were concerned about society in their own different ways; their philosophies and insights emerged from the nineteenth century, literate, middle-class backgrounds to which they belonged. On some matters, their views were very different. Gender played an important role in their approach to analysing their respective cultures. Woolf was much younger than Freud, but had strong feminist views. As Julia Briggs notes: "For Freud patriarchy constituted an optimal order, so that the coming of the Second World War was symptomatic of its breakdown; for Woolf, patriarchy was a dangerous system in which the tyrannical father corresponded to the tyrannical ruler: it contributed to wars and had to be left behind. Despite substantial and irreconcilable differences, Freud and Woolf shared many values and some experiences; they belonged to and were the products of the same cultural moment."

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Novelists of that period, particularly Woolf and James Joyce, saw Freud's ideas as a threat, because they seemed to question the nature of their creative powers. Freud's theories needed responding to, particularly because they were connected with characters' inner thoughts – this at a time when, as discussed earlier, the novel was increasingly concerned with such thoughts. It was understandable, therefore, that Woolf (and Joyce) actively resisted Freud's ideas. It could be argued that the work of artists like Woolf and Joyce emerged out of their own experiences and memories; yet psychoanalysis threatened to unravel the creative tensions that generated such work by inquiring into its roots.

Some writers have argued that Virginia Woolf might have been helped by personal psychoanalysis, but that she had too much resistance to accept such help. It should be noted that psychoanalysis did not gain acceptance in England for a long time, so it is unlikely that any doctor would have recommended analysis for her. Alix Strachey, who was a practising psychoanalyst and an old friend of the Woolfs, discussed why Leonard had not persuaded Virginia to see a psychoanalyst about her mental breakdowns. She concluded "Virginia's imagination, apart from her artistic creativeness, was so interwoven with her fantasies – and indeed with her madness – that if you had stopped the madness you might have stopped the creativeness too ... It may be preferable to be mad and be creative than to be treated by analysis and become ordinary." (Briggs) However, it can also be argued that creative people are not necessarily made ordinary by a personal psychoanalysis. Many have been helped.

Arguably, Woolf's representation of family life in *To the Lighthouse* was shaped by Freud's insights, even though she claimed in one of her letters, "I have not studied Dr Freud or any psychoanalyst – indeed I think I have never read any of their books: my knowledge is merely from superficial talk. Therefore any use of their methods must be instinctive."

In spite of the close connection, Woolf resisted reading the works of Freud. Finally the two came face to face on 28 January 1939, at 20 Maresfield Gardens. Freud was dying of cancer and could hardly speak; nevertheless he seems to have got Woolf's full attention. He presented her with a narcissus. After this meeting, Woolf began to read his works.

In a diary entry dated 2 December 1939, Woolf wrote: "Began reading Freud last night; to enlarge the circumference. to give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside. Thus defeat the shrinkage of age ..." (p. 248). About a week later she added: "... I

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dislike this excitement. yet enjoy it. Ambivalence as Freud calls it. (I'm gulping up Freud)" (p. 249). The next day she added: "Freud is upsetting: reducing one to whirlpool; & I daresay truly ... His savagery against God good. The falseness of loving one's neighbours ... Hate ... But I'm too mixed" (p. 250). Her reading in December 1939 apparently included 'The future of an illusion', 'Civilization and its discontents', and 'Group psychology and the analysis of the ego'.

Woolf returned to reading Freud in June 1940 when she was writing *A Sketch of the Past*. She made good use of the term 'ambivalence' as she wrote about her father. Recalling his scenes when the household accounts were reviewed each Wednesday, she contrasts her reactions and Vanessa's: "But in me, though not in her, rage alternated with love. It was only the other day when I read Freud for the first time, that I discovered that this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate is a common feeling; and is called ambivalence ...". She must have been considerably relieved to have a name for her turbulent feelings, and even more to learn that she was not alone.

That was on 19 June. Then, the diary for 27 June includes: "How difficult to make oneself a centre after all of the rings a visitor stirs in one—in this case E. Bowen. How difficult to draw in from all those wide ripples & be at home, central. I tried to centre by reading Freud ...". This is Virginia Woolf's last diary entry on Freud.

### **Mrs Dalloway**

**Mrs Dalloway** was published on 14 May 1925, and is regarded as the first of Virginia Woolf's major works. Woolf created it from two of her short stories, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and the unfinished "The Prime Minister". In October 2005, *Mrs Dalloway* was included on *Time* magazine's list of the 100 best English-language novels written since 1923.

In psychoanalysis firsts are crucial. When a patient comes for his /her first session with the analyst, she is told to 'let herself go'. As Freud would say: 'speak as you would do in a conversation in which you were rambling on quite disconnectedly and at random.' *Mrs Dalloway* follows free association, acquiring a certain fluidity through the stream of consciousness technique and in keeping with Bergson's concept of psychological time. The time of the thing told and the time of narration merge in *Mrs Dalloway* in a continuous mix of past and present. The background story, rather than being told through a narrator,

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emerges through memories. According to J. Hillis Miller, *Mrs Dalloway* is “a brilliant exposition of the functioning of memory as a form of repetition”.

*Mrs Dalloway* lends itself well to psychoanalysis. The text has two principal characters who never meet, but act as a foil to each other. The protagonist Clarissa Dalloway is quite complex. On the one hand, she is constantly dipping into her past, yet wanting to keep the folds of the present intact. The novel captures the trauma and shell shock of the First World War through her double, Septimus Warren Smith.

The writing style is unusual, the pace of sentences often mirroring the thoughts of the characters – sometimes moving rapidly, sometimes slow and poetic. Parentheses are used frequently, indicating thoughts within thoughts, sometimes quite unrelated to each other. Woolf uses free indirect speech most of the time. Quotation marks are rarely used to indicate dialogue. Thus the divide between characters’ interior and exterior selves remains fluid.

Woolf’s view that the structure of a novel is like a spider’s web has been quoted elsewhere. For *Mrs Dalloway*, she carefully crafts this web-like structure. The characters are placed on the edges of the web and slowly they gravitate towards the centre. Most of the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* are introduced as and when Clarissa Dalloway thinks of them. In the opening pages, Clarissa refers to Hugh Whitbread, Peter Walsh, Elizabeth, Richard and Sally Seton, but the reader does not learn until later who these people are and what part they play in Clarissa’s life. As the novel progresses, we learn more about the characters and several of them interact. Finally all the threads meet at the centre, which is Clarissa Dalloway’s party at the end of the novel where Elizabeth, Richard, Sally, Peter and Clarissa all get together. Through a psychoanalytic reading we become aware of their unconscious wishes, desires and processes of grief, loss, mourning and melancholia in the novel.

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## ***Time and Memory***

The opening sentence of *Mrs Dalloway* is "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself". In a psychoanalytic reading, the opening lines of the novel evoke a character – Clarissa Dalloway, her nuances, some narcissism, a certain choice of flowers perhaps, and a lonely sojourn through a day in June, for hosting a party in the evening. When Clarissa steps outside, she remembers her life in Bourton, the past takes over, then a memory of her former suitor Peter Walsh brings her back into the present with, "he would be back from India one of these days"(3). That the past is told through memory, rather than the omniscient narrator, means the past truth is as subjective as is the present. In Clarissa there is an unconscious wish to meet Peter Walsh. Bourton appears in her consciousness many times in the text, expressing her longing for the countryside, much like Woolf's own.

Even as other characters are introduced and we are given an insight into their psyche in which there exists a kind of timelessness, Big Ben (which stands for chronological time) brings us back to London, and to Mrs Dalloway. The life of Clarissa Dalloway in London is punctuated accurately, irrevocably by the chimes of Big Ben, which is a symbol of England and its imperial power. The chimes sound unremittingly, always reminding one about the passage of time and the consciousness of death. However, Woolf strives to say how transient, how ephemeral time is, no matter how one clamours after it.

London, in 1923, is still a city where there are clocks which tell the time. Such clocks chime on the quarters of time passing, life frittering by followed by the finality of the sounding of the hour. Big Ben: "... Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air." (4) Another, St. Margaret's, strikes as Peter is remembering that Clarissa "has been ill... her heart, he remembered ... and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room." (41) Unconsciously it suggests rage that Peter holds against Clarissa for rejecting him, but he does not reveal it.

A striking characteristic of the novel is that it is not divided into chapters. It is presented as one continuous chapter entitled *Mrs Dalloway*. However, the narrative is divided into units as Big Ben strikes the hours. Every hour has its own importance for the characters. Septimus and his Italian wife Lucrezia (Rezia) sit in the park waiting for the doctor's

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appointment. "It is time," said Rezia. The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time ... " (56-57) It is time for Septimus's appointment with the psychiatrist Sir William Bradshaw.

There is a suggestion in the novel that the human predicament knows no limits of time. The old woman at the Regent's Park Tube station, for instance, continues to sing the same song for what seems like eternity. Indeed, time is of such importance in the novel that Woolf initially gave it the working title *The Hours*.

Time sometimes also takes on fluid qualities for Clarissa, such as when the chime from Big Ben "flood[s]" her room, marking another passing hour. Rezia, in a rare moment of happiness with Septimus after he has helped her make a hat, allows her words to trail off "like a contented tap left running." (116) One character's thoughts appear, intensify, then fade into another's, much like breakers in the sea that rise up, then fall. Memories consist of repressed material which is remembered, repeated and gone through.

In Rezia, the act of Septimus's suicide is met by denial and loss of grief, bordering on amnesia. "The clock was striking – one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself. She was falling asleep. But the clock went on striking, four, five, six and Mrs Filmer waving her apron (they wouldn't bring the body in here, would they?) seemed part of that garden; or a flag. She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the war. Of her memories, most were happy." (121)

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### ***Waves: Maternal Waters***

A frequent association is that of Clarissa experiencing “the flap of a wave”, “the kiss of a wave”. Virginia Woolf makes a number of references to water and to country life in Bourton, based on her own experiences. The sea, sometimes tranquil, powerful, other times choppy, has a deep impact on Clarissa, nearly always suggesting the possibility of extinction or death. While Clarissa mends her party dress, she thinks about the peaceful cycle of waves collecting and falling on a summer day: “Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. 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 sorrows to some sea ...” (32)

Psychoanalytically the sea would correspond to maternal waters, a wish for exclusive fusion with the mother. There are references to her mother as an ‘invisible presence’, to use Woolf’s own phrase, as an ‘internal object’ in the language of psychoanalysis. There is intense ‘ambivalence’ towards the figure of the mother in Woolf. Laplanche and Pontalis (26-27) define ambivalence as “The simultaneous existence of contrary tendencies, attitudes or feelings in the relationship to a single object, especially the coexistence of love and hate”. Elizabeth Abel has traced the increasing ‘narrative centrality’ of the mother in Woolf’s writing in the 1920s — *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). According to Abel, these three texts show an evolving pattern in which the figure of the mother has become increasingly central over the course of time. Moreover, the more central she becomes, the more ambivalence the texts reveal. Abel relates this shift to the theoretical discussions going on within psychoanalysis during this period. This movement in Woolf’s writing, Abel claims, indicates an increasing ‘alignment’ with the position of Melanie Klein.

Melanie Klein made her seminal contributions to psychoanalytic thought with her object-relations theory, which is a system of psychological explanation based on the premise that the mind is comprised of elements taken in from outside by means of the processes of internalization. I return to Woolf’s relationship with her mother. In Klein’s theory, the first

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object for the infant is a *part object*. The infant does not respond to the mother as a whole person, but simply as a 'breast', a supplier of its needs. In turn, the breast becomes an object of desire in its own right. The ego is strengthened by the finding of good objects. Their internalization (introjection and identification) is important for the development of psychic structures and mental functioning. Woolf's early emotional life is characterized by a sense of losing and regaining the good object. The innate conflict between love and hate leads to the internalization of good objects and bad objects. These ideas are applied below to understand Clarissa's relationships with her daughter Elizabeth and with Sally.

Flowers are also symbolic of her mother's presence for Virginia Woolf. In *Mrs Dalloway*, there is a long passage about Clarissa buying flowers. The description of flowers is so alive, almost poetic. "There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises.... roses, carnations, irises – glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself ... Over the cherry pie, over the evening primroses." (11) It brings to mind a description from *A Sketch of the Past*. The first memory is of Virginia sitting in her mother's lap and on her mother's dress she describes the red and purple flowers on a black ground. "Flowers itself were part of the earth, that a ring enclosed what was the flower, and that was the real flower, part earth, part flower." (Woolf 1985:79)

Clarissa needs the presence of the maternal all the time. "But, thank you Lucy, oh thank you," said Mrs Dalloway, and thank you, thank you she went on saying (sitting down on the sofa with her dress over her knees, her scissors, her silks), thank you, thank you she went on saying in gratitude to her servants generally for helping her to be like this, to be what she wanted, gentle, generous-hearted. Her servants liked her." (32) These lines are indicative of a hysteric need for the maternal, needing the mother figure and her approval all the time.

Clarissa, her daughter Elizabeth and her tutor and friend Miss Kilman are caught in a triangular relationship. Clarissa is proud to show off Elizabeth, especially to Peter, an attempt which is again quite narcissistic. Elizabeth however rebels at an 'insincere' (40) introduction by her mother. The jealousy evoked by this triangle can be examined through a Kleinian approach. According to Klein, "Jealousy is based on envy, but involves a relation to a least *two* other people. It pertains to a triangular (oedipal) relationship, i.e. it is whole-object oriented. It is commonly experienced with respect to love that a person feels is their

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due and has been taken away, or is in danger of being taken away, by a rival. Jealousy aims at the possession of the loved object and removal of the rival. It is usually the rival that is the target for aggression, which might suppress a more deeply felt envy towards the loved object. Also, in jealousy there may be a fear of losing what one has." (Hiles 2007)



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### ***Desire and Loss***

Jacques Lacan said that "it is only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire appears in the full sense of the term." It is interesting to note that, in *Mrs Dalloway*, desire is hardly recognized and expressed. "Come to my party tonight" is one recurrent wish laden with anxiety. It is a narcissistic wish; Clarissa wants applause.

Peter Walsh's desire for Clarissa keeps shifting between the past and present. Peter is unsparing in his criticism of Clarissa's hysterical manner, making her feel extremely self-conscious. She does not retaliate. "Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners, like a real hostess, and wanted to introduce him to someone – spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him." (50) Peter's rejection by Clarissa is deeply hurtful and quite a narcissistic injury for him. "'We've had enough of that feeble joke.' That was all; but for him it was as if she had said 'I'm only amusing myself with you; I've an understanding with Richard Dalloway.'" (52) When talking to Clarissa, Peter keeps playing with his pocket-knife. The phallic significance is obvious. T. E. Apter, however, has a different view: "The crude symbol of his all-too-present pocket knife is not a sign of sexual aggression – at least there is nothing else in the novel other than the possible association of the knife with the phallus to support an erotic interpretation of Peter's pocket knife; rather, it is a mark of his desire to intrude upon Clarissa's mental privacy and to defend himself against others' scrutiny and criticism which makes him insensitive to them." (Apter 1979: 62)

After shopping for flowers, Clarissa returns home to a house "cool as a vault" (24). It is not warm, neither with cheer, nor with sexuality. The room has a very virginal feel: "The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be." (25) Clarissa feels a sense of repetition, the need to find meaning in her mundane life, reflecting on her own mortality, her angst. Even though she has a family, Clarissa is very lonely, and tries hard to cope with it. She yearns for love, and her first association is with her friend Sally Seton in Bourton. Clarissa's sexuality is complex. Her intense longing is for Sally, yet she likes Peter's attention and Richard's security.

Clarissa remembers going downstairs in a white dress to meet Sally, thinking of a line from Shakespeare's *Othello*—"if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." The most

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exquisite moment of Clarissa's life occurred on the terrace at Bourton when, one evening, Sally picked a flower and kissed her on the lips.

"Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally." (29)

"... It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check, and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion" (26)

Sally was radical, cigarette smoking, much of a rebel "who read Plato in bed and before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour". Woolf elaborates more on Clarissa's idealisation of Sally. "But all that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an extraordinary beauty of the kind she admired, dark, large-eyed, with that quality which, since she hadn't got it in herself, she always envied – a sort of abandonment..." (27) To look at it within the discourse of psychoanalysis, it is unconscious envy in the words of Klein.

For Lacan, "desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second". Lacan adds that "desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need." Hence desire can never be satisfied, for it is not a relation to an object but a relation to a lack.

Septimus too had experienced desire. Before the war scarred him, he was an aspiring poet and was in love with Miss Isabel Pole, who used to lecture on Shakespeare. On this June day, he sees his friend the dead Evans walking towards him. The intensity with which Septimus misses Evans not only suggests a homosexual relationship, but also a strong death wish in Septimus. After Evans' death, Septimus was left numb, without feeling.

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## **Homosexuality**

Virginia Woolf's own life was marked by maternal figures with whom she shared very close relationships. Her first relationship was with Violet Dickenson. The two went on holiday to Venice, Florence and Paris. Later in her life, as mentioned elsewhere, she had a very intimate relationship with the poet Vita Sackville-West which continued till her death.

Scholarly writing on *Mrs Dalloway* has recognised the importance of the kiss that Clarissa shared with Sally Seton. What did the kiss mean? That remains to be questioned. Is it simply the innocence of childhood friendship, or is it evidence of a repressed lesbian identity?

Recently, the kiss has sparked debate among queer theorists regarding its relationship to temporality. Some theorists, as Kate Haffey says, tend to focus on the kiss between Clarissa and Sally "as a moment that temporarily interrupts her inevitable movement towards marriage and reproduction. This is a moment that is out of sync with the dominant narratives about heterosexual development. ... This moment is thus an "erotic pause", part of the novel's tendency to create pockets where time functions in a different manner."

In *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Elizabeth Abel refers to the Clarissa in the Bourton scenes as "adolescent Clarissa" and speaks of the division between adolescent and adult Clarissa "as a binary opposition between past and present". Unconsciously Sally is able to "immediately spark love in the eighteen-year old Clarissa." In this way, Sally "replaces Clarissa's dead mother and sister" and inspires a love "equivalent in absoluteness to a daughter's earliest bond with the mother, a bond too early ruptured for Clarissa." The unconscious wish in Clarissa is to be the man to the mother.

Other possible homosexual relationships in the novel are between Elizabeth and Miss Kilman and Septimus and the dead Evans. Clarissa is disapproving of her daughter's relationship with her tutor. "And there was Elizabeth closeted all the time with Miss Kilman. Anything more nauseating she could not conceive. Prayer at this hour with that woman." (95) Further, Clarissa reports to Richard: "'Kilman arrives just as we've done lunch,' she said. 'Elizabeth turns pink. They shut themselves. I suppose they're praying.' Lord! He didn't like

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it; but these things pass over if you let them." (96) There is a clear hint here of a lesbian relationship.

Miss Kilman has channelized her sexuality into gorging herself with food. "Elizabeth rather wondered whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next them; then, when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake – the pink one. The pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and then to be baffled even in that!" (105)



# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

## ***War, Trauma and Mental Illness***

'In adopting the term [trauma], psychoanalysis carries the three ideas implicit in it over on to the psychological level: the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organisation.' (Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 466)

The First World War forms a backdrop to the novel, even though the action takes place in 1923, four years after the Armistice. The text captures the relief felt by the English people after the War. Modernism and change follow. The War – which has been like paternal domination – has changed people's notions about what English society ought to be like. The characters are lost in this modern world. Meaningful links in this dissociated post war world are not easy to make, no matter how much effort the characters make. Clarissa Dalloway stops at a shop where before the war one 'could buy almost perfect gloves.' She quickly returns to realise that her daughter Elizabeth doesn't care either about gloves or shoes. Elizabeth seems to be falling in love with her history teacher Miss Kilman who is German, and Clarissa doesn't quite approve of that.

In 1923, the old establishment, with its oppressive values, is beginning to crumble. English citizens, including most of the characters in the novel, feel the failure of the British empire as strongly as they feel their own personal failures. Peter has just returned from his imperialist adventures in India and is in love with an Indian girl. There are people who still believe in and uphold English tradition, such as Aunt Helena and Lady Bruton, but they are old. Lady Bruton is a "physically powerful, emphatically phallic woman" (Minow-Pinkney 2010:75), but she belongs decisively to the past.

Anticipating the end of the Conservative Party's reign, Richard plans to write a history of the Brutons, whom he thinks of as the great British military family, who are already part of the past. The British empire faces an impending demise, and the loss of the traditional and familiar social order leaves the English at a loss. The militaristic Lady Bruton, the epitome of the English ruling classes, "never spoke of England, but this isle of men, this dear, dear land was in her blood (without reading Shakespeare), and if ever a woman could have worn the helmet and shot the arrow, could have led troops to attack ... that woman was Millicent Bruton."

## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

Clarissa's double in the novel is a war victim – Septimus Warren Smith, "aged about thirty, pale faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat..." (12) Septimus cannot get over the trauma of the War and is delusional.

A motor car comes to a sudden halt. "Passers-by who of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove grey upholstery, before a male hand drew a blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey." (12) Septimus feels he is responsible for the traffic congestion, for the motor car which has stopped. Septimus hallucinates about "everything coming together to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had almost come to the surface and was about to burst into flames..." (12-13). The shock of war has been so deeply disturbing, so overwhelming that it is difficult for Septimus to either repress it or experience it fully. In his character, at an unconscious level, there is deep omnipotence. There is a wish to control, perhaps an unconscious wish to be different. In his case too, Germany represents the tyrannical father who has punished him and left him as a war victim. The rage is finally turned inward and Septimus seeks to punish himself, which he ultimately does by jumping out of the window.

Septimus suffers from melancholia throughout the novel. In his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud suggested that certain depressions were caused by turning guilt-ridden anger on the self. The clinical picture presented by melancholia reveals the violence of a compulsion to self punishment that can go as far as suicide. In the words of Melanie Klein, "Reality passes its verdict – that the object no longer exists – upon each single one of the memories and hopes through which the libido was attached to the lost object, and the ego, confronted as it were with the decision whether it will share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of its 'narcissistic satisfactions' in being alive to sever its attachment to the non-existent object." (Mitchell 161)

There are his moments of madness in the text which his wife Rezia does not understand. Septimus looks for a purpose in life and there lies Woolf's irony: 'what purpose'?

An aeroplane which flies overhead seems to form the letters TOFFEE. Septimus thinks it is some kind of coded language. He hallucinates, and hears the birds sing to him in Greek. "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus,

## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words ..." (20) This is an autobiographical reference, since Woolf had experienced something similar in one of her breakdowns. Roger Poole (1995) has discussed in detail the role played by Greek in Woolf's consciousness as well as unconscious mind. "For Virginia, Greek was a symbol for everything that she personally would never be able to attain to. Greek was an ideal, a touchstone, an abstraction of pure intellection. ... It was a symbol for her own failure, her own impracticality, her shifting nature, her irrepressible unlearnedness" (175)

Woolf gives us a criticism of psychiatry as it was in those times, linking with her own mental illness. Mirroring her own experience with psychiatrists, Woolf creates insensitive doctors who provide no empathy. Doctor Holmes in the novel dismisses Septimus' illness. "Dr Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him." It is a cold diagnosis. Dr Holmes wants Septimus to look outside of himself, offering Septimus no space to look within and translate the experience of madness into meaning, and then perhaps a possibility to heal.

Dr. Holmes recommends Sir William Bradshaw, a renowned London psychiatrist – a "rich self obsessed careerist". Sir William proceeds by force of personality and his capacity to know when a patient, such as Septimus is "a case of extreme gravity, complete breakdown" within two or three minutes of meeting him. Septimus expresses guilt and threatens to end his life, for he has committed a terrible crime.

Sir William determines that Septimus has suffered a complete nervous breakdown and prescribes a long period of bed rest in one of his homes in the country. Septimus will have to be separated from Rezia, though. Sir William does not use the term "madness," preferring instead to speak of a "lack of proportion." Septimus feels he is being "tortured by human nature" by Dr Holmes and Sir William, who "forbade childbirth, penalised despair."

# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

## ***Loneliness and Death***

As Woolf describes Clarissa, there was “a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty and grown very white since her illness.” (3) Clarissa has both the experiences: feeling very young and at the same time unspeakably aged. Woolf dives into Clarissa’s mind – she is intuitive; she can judge people by instinct. On the one hand Mrs Dalloway looks forward to life; on the other she is unspeakably dreadful about life itself. It is almost as if she has already pre-empted the day’s events.

‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun  
Nor the furious winter’s rages.’

These lines from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (IV ii. 258-9) are echoed throughout the text by both Clarissa and Septimus. The line is from a funeral song that celebrates death as a comfort after a difficult life.

The central conflict in Clarissa’s life is to choose between solitude and communication. She identifies with the old woman in the house across from hers. She projects her own anxiety about being alone on to her. Even as Clarissa admires and envies the old woman’s solitude, she knows it comes with an inevitable loneliness. The doors and windows that form a recurrent motif in the novel represent this conflict symbolically. At her house, workers remove the doors from the hinges for the party, where Clarissa will gather people together. In Bourton she had valued space to realise both solitude and company. She remembers how the blinds used to flap there.

There is a gulf between Richard and Clarissa, even though the marriage endures. After lunch at Lady Bruton’s, Richard buys Clarissa a bunch of roses but cannot give them to her or say that he loves her. Even though she values the privacy she is able to maintain in her marriage, considering it vital to the success of the relationship, at the same time she finds slightly disturbing the fact that Richard doesn’t know everything about her. Clarissa’s comment on marriage, in her choosing Richard Dalloway who’s a Member of Parliament and declining her suitor Peter Walsh, is:

“So she would find herself arguing at St James’s Park, still making out that she had been right –and she had too – not to marry him. For in marriage, a little licence, a little

## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning, for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into.”(6)

Rezia too is pained by her loneliness, for Septimus is too far away in his own world and can't relate to her. Perhaps Virginia Woolf's comment is that it is difficult to relate to insanity. Rezia and Septimus present a contrast, one looks within, the other at the outer world.

Death in the novel is both meaningful and threatening. Death is the ultimate quietude and ageing a primary concern. Clarissa keeps anxious about when the circle of life will stop. Septimus's suicidal embrace of death ultimately helps her to be at peace with her own mortality.

When Dr Holmes arrives, Septimus – who is soon to be taken to the asylum –commits suicide by throwing himself out of the window. In the words of Jean Thomson (2004): "... through Septimus, Virginia Woolf is able to describe both death and the brink of insanity, where it is difficult to know what is really there, and the deep depression which the sufferer believes is only to be resolved by suicide. Her own experiences of excitement and depression are woven into the book, giving authenticity to the portrayal of the ex-soldier and his states of mind.”

As the text comes to a close, two things happen. On the one hand, people get together at Clarissa's party – Sally, now the mother of five sons, the gentry including Lady Bruton, even the Prime Minister. Woolf focuses on Sir William Bradshaw, who brings the news of Septimus's suicide. Clarissa goes into a little room so she can be alone. Death is close, yet Clarissa feels that Septimus has taken on the burden of her own life. Perhaps he has preserved something that is lost for her. Septimus has finally succeeded in being Clarissa's double. Clarissa returns to life, painfully.

# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

## Adaptations

A film based on the novel, with the same title, was made in 1997. It was directed by Marleen Gorris and starred Vanessa Redgrave in the lead role, with Rupert Graves as Septimus Warren Smith.

Available online: [click here](#) (check legal status)

**The Hours** is a 1998 novel written by Michael Cunningham. It won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the 1999 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. The book depicts three generations of women affected by the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. The first is Woolf herself writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1923 and struggling with her own mental illness. The second is Mrs. Brown, wife of a World War II veteran, who is reading *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1949 as she plans her husband's birthday party. The third is Clarissa Vaughan, a lesbian, who plans a party in 2001 to celebrate a major literary award received by her good friend and former lover, the poet Richard, who is dying of an AIDS-related illness.

**The Hours** is a 2002 film directed by Stephen Daldry, and starring Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore and Ed Harris. The screenplay by David Hare is based on the Michael Cunningham novel. For her performance in the film as Virginia Woolf, Nicole Kidman received the Oscar for Best Actress.

For a trailer, [click here](#).

## Conclusion

*Mrs Dalloway* keeps a delicate balance between life and death. They seem to run parallel.

Woolf wrote furiously and marvellously, but at the cost of her health, denying life. Woolf determinedly refused treatment, choosing repeated bouts of madness but retaining her creativity. We can recall the view of Alix Strachey, quoted earlier:

"... if you had stopped the madness you might have stopped the creativeness too ... It may be preferable to be mad and be creative than to be treated by analysis and become ordinary."

## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

I am left wondering: if she had sought psychoanalytic treatment and lived longer, would she have been as brilliant a writer?

I close with a letter she wrote to her husband before her suicide.

Tuesday.

Dearest,

I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that - everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer.

I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

V.

### Summary

The lesson begins with a detailed biography of Virginia Woolf. Her involvement with the Bloomsbury Group is described in a separate section. The work of Woolf and her contemporaries is put into perspective with a brief history of the English novel and the course taken by it in the twentieth century. Modernism, and particularly the way Woolf related to modernism, forms the subject of the next section. I have discussed Virginia Woolf as a major feminist writer.

The background for a psychoanalytic reading of the text is laid out by recalling some key concepts from the works of Sigmund Freud. This is followed by a long section entitled

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Psychoanalysis and Virginia Woolf, in which psychoanalytic concepts are applied to understand the life and work of Woolf. Her own views on psychoanalysis and her complex relationship with Freud are also discussed.

The section on Mrs Dalloway is divided into a number of thematic sub-sections: Time and Memory, Waves: Maternal Waters, Desire and Loss, Homosexuality, War, Trauma and Mental Illness and Loneliness and Death.

Adaptations of the text in film and book form are listed. The lesson ends with a brief concluding section.



# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

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Britannica Online Encyclopedia, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/647786/Virginia-Woolf>

Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Woolf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Woolf), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs\\_Dalloway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs_Dalloway)

### Virginia Woolf: list of works

#### Novels

*The Voyage Out* (1915)

*Night and Day* (1919)

*Jacob's Room* (1922)

*Mrs Dalloway* (1925)

*To the Lighthouse* (1927)

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*Orlando* (1928)

*The Waves* (1931)

*The Years* (1937)

*Between the Acts* (1941)

### Short story collections

*Kew Gardens* (1919)

*Monday or Tuesday* (1921)

*A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1944)

*Mrs Dalloway's Party* (1973)

*The Complete Shorter Fiction* (1985)

### "Biographies"

Virginia Woolf published three books to which she gave the subtitle "A Biography":

*Orlando: A Biography* (1928, usually characterised as a *novel*)

*Flush: A Biography* (1933), a stream-of-consciousness tale by Flush, a dog owned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940)

### Non-fiction books

*Modern Fiction* (1919)

*The Common Reader* (1925)

*A Room of One's Own* (1929)

*On Being Ill* (1930)

*The London Scene* (1931)

*The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932)

*Three Guineas* (1938)

*The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942)

*The Moment and Other Essays* (1947)

*The Captain's Death Bed And Other Essays* (1950)

*Granite and Rainbow* (1958)

*Books and Portraits* (1978)

*Women And Writing* (1979)

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*Collected Essays* (four volumes)

### Drama

*Freshwater: A Comedy* (performed in 1923, revised in 1935, and published in 1976)

### Autobiographical writings and diaries

*A Writer's Diary* (1953)—Extracts from the complete diary

*Moments of Being* (1976)

*A Moment's Liberty: the shorter diary* (1990)

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# Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

## Glossary

**Ego:** the part of the personality structure that acts according to the reality principle; i.e. it seeks to please the id's drive in realistic ways that will benefit the individual in the long term

**Id:** the unorganized part of the personality structure that contains a person's basic, instinctual drives; governed by the pleasure principle

**Masochism:** sexual perversion in which satisfaction is tied to the suffering or humiliation undergone by the subject

**Melancholia:** depression caused by turning guilt-ridden anger on the self; its clinical picture reveals the violence of a compulsion to self punishment that can go as far as suicide

**Modernism:** a movement in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, across all the creative arts, especially poetry, fiction, drama, painting, music and architecture, marked by the influence of thinkers like Darwin, Marx, Freud and Einstein; its characteristics include a break with traditions and a preoccupation with the inner self and consciousness

**Narcissism:** the attitude of a person who treats her/his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated

**Oedipus Complex:** organised body of loving and hostile wishes which the child experiences towards its parents, named after the character in Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus the King*; marked by a desire of the death of the rival – the parent of the same sex – and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex

**Psychoanalysis:** the 'talking cure' developed by Freud; its theoretical framework

**Psychological novel:** a work of fiction in which the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters are of equal or greater interest than is the external action of the narrative.

**Stream of consciousness:** a literary technique pioneered by Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce, characterized by a flow of thoughts and images, which may not always appear to have a coherent structure or cohesion

**Super-ego:** the part of the personality structure that strives to act in a socially appropriate manner; it controls our sense of right and wrong and guilt, and helps us fit into society

**Trauma:** used in psychoanalysis to convey the three ideas implicit in it at the psychical level: the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organisation

## Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway

### Timeline

Year	Historical event	Important Publication	Important Work of Art	Birth/death of important people
1857	Indian uprising			Joseph Conrad born
1859		Darwin: <i>Origin of Species</i> ; Dickens: <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>		
1861	American Civil War begins			Rabindranath Tagore born
1865		Carroll: <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>		Abraham Lincoln assassinated
1867		Marx: <i>Capital</i>		
1869				Mahatma Gandhi born
1876	Invention of the telephone			
1881		Henry James: <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i>		
1882				Virginia Woolf born; James Joyce born
1885				D. H. Lawrence born
1888				T. S. Eliot born
1889				Jawaharlal Nehru born
1899		Freud: <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i>		
1900		Conrad: <i>Lord Jim</i> ;		
1905		Einstein's first paper on Theory of Relativity		
1903	First powered aircraft flown			
1907		Conrad: <i>The Secret Agent</i>	Picasso paints the Damsels of Avignon	
1910				King Edward dies
1913		Lawrence: <i>Sons and Lovers</i>		
1914	First World War begins	Joyce: <i>Dubliners</i> ; Freud: <i>On Narcissism</i>		
1915		Woolf: <i>The Voyage</i>	D. W. Griffith	

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		<i>Out</i>	directs <i>The Birth of a Nation</i>	
1917	Bolshevik Revolution in Russia	Eliot: <i>Prufrock and Other Observations</i>		
1918	First World War ends	Joyce: serial publication of <i>Ulysses</i> begins		
1919	Treaty of Versailles			
1920	League of Nations founded; civil war in Ireland; Oxford University admits women to degrees	Freud: <i>Beyond the Pleasure Principle</i>		
1921	Irish free state is established			
1922		Eliot: <i>The Waste Land</i>		
1925		Woolf: <i>Mrs Dalloway</i>	Eisenstein directs <i>The Battleship Potemkin</i>	
1926	General strike in Britain			
1927		Woolf: <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	Talkies begin: <i>The Jazz Singer</i>	
1928	Vote given to women in Britain			
1932	Hunger march from Jarrow to London; Stalin purges Communist party, intelligentsia and army			
1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor; Nazis largest party			
1938	Hitler annexes Austria			
1939	Second World War begins			Sigmund Freud dies
1940	Battle of Britain			
1941				Virginia Woolf dies