**Mrs. Dalloway: Virginia Woolf**

Virginia Woolf is known for using stream of consciousness in her writing. The novel Mrs. Dalloway follows the thoughts, experiences, and memories of several characters on a single day in London. Stream of consciousness is a style or technique of writing that tries to capture the natural flow of a character's extended thought process, often by incorporating sensory impressions, incomplete ideas, unusual syntax, and rough grammar. Stream of consciousness writing allows readers to “listen in” on a character's thoughts. The technique often involves the use of language in unconventional ways in an attempt to replicate the complicated pathways that thoughts take as they unfold and move through the mind. In short, it's the use of language to mimic the "streaming" nature of "conscious" thought (thus "stream of consciousness"). Stream of consciousness can be written in the first person as well as the third person.

**Salient features of stream of consciousness:**

Stream of consciousness writing is associated with the early 20th-century Modernist movement.

The term “stream of consciousness” originated in psychology before literary critics began using it to describe a narrative style that depicts how people think.

Stream of consciousness is used primarily in fiction and poetry, but the term has also been used to describe plays and films that attempt to visually represent a character's thoughts.

**Stream of Consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway***

Virginia Woolf is known for using stream of consciousness in her writing. The novel [Mrs. Dalloway](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/mrs-dalloway) follows the thoughts, experiences, and memories of several characters on a single day in London. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.

Woolf does more than simply where Mrs. Dalloway watched the taxis and thought about her life. Rather, she lets the reader into the character's thoughts by using long sentences with semicolons to show the slow drift of ideas and the transitions between thoughts. Readers are able to watch as Mrs. Dalloway's mind moves from observations about things she is seeing to reflections on her general attitude towards life, and then moves on to memories from her childhood, then back to the taxi cabs in the street, and finally to Peter, a former romantic interest. This is an excellent example of using associative leaps and sensory impressions to create a stream of consciousness. Woolf manages to convey not only the content but the structure and process of Mrs. Dalloway's thoughts, a fact which is all the more impressive because she does so while writing in the third person.

**Interpretation of the novel**

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

Mrs. Dalloway, through its depiction of Clarissa and Septimus, who can be seen as foils for each other, and of the political atmosphere in Britain during the 1920s, explores the fragmented yet fluid nature of time and the interconnectedness of perception and reality across individuals and social spheres. Clarissa, a woman of high society, is primarily concerned with giving a good party—perhaps as a means of affirming life and fending off death. When news of Septimus’s death is interjected into her party, she is annoyed, as it might dampen everyone’s spirits. She appears at times to be concerned only with the surfaces of things, but her seeming disillusionment with reality can be understood as a coping mechanism. Clarissa tries to ignore the uncomfortable realities of her surroundings—the residual horrors of World War I and her own implied mental illness—and instead engages at the superficial level of societal rules and expectations. Septimus, on the other hand, represents the breakdown of such a society: unable to live with the idea of confinement, he jumps to his death. Clarissa does not face the same sort of confinement, but her freedom is shown at times to be an illusion. She does not commit suicide of the body, but, by shielding herself from uncomfortable realities, she commits emotional suicide, some critics argue. However, Clarissa’s identification with Septimus at the end of the novel also implies that she is somewhat aware of the limits on her freedom. It also seems to relieve her of her disillusionment, if only momentarily, as she praises Septimus for having the courage to escape the confinement that she sees in her own life despite her efforts to ignore it.

This novel also displays the might of Britain and its role in colonial era, and may be this novel was instrumental or specifically designed to overcome the stress of post world war 1 Britain. It also showcases the role of woman in British society and the influence they had over the British political hierarchy. The key character Mrs Dalloway comes from British high class socialite background and the other characters revolving around this key character are also of same level and thus Woolf significantly clarifies that in the late 20’s role of a woman was modern, independent and set new benchmarks in the British society. The Novel also indicates the significant difference between an aristocratic society which Britain possessed with excellence and the lower middle class society, who were the back bone of entire British colonial and industrial success. The difference has been beautifully indicated by co-relating the events with post world war-1 catastrophe. Woolf indicates that, British aristocratic society was not radically affected by world war-1 and was reaping the benefits of British colonial wealth but the middle class suffered drastically as people had to deal with mental and emotional pain, which the war had gifted them. However, Woolf beautifully tried to convince the readers that not only the middle class family but wealthy aristocratic society suffered as well by emphasizing the trauma of loneliness, haunting the novel character Clarissa who comes from an aristocratic background.

Woolf successfully takes her readers to a trans-state where the readers experience the power of materialistic world and the conjunctional attitude of historic and political wrath by which the war has gained fuel. Woolf describes, that the colonial attitude of Britain might set a new world order and help Britain reap its benefits in a long run. Theoretically, it may bring benefits in a long run but it will also enrage the people of other worlds who are equally trying to compete with Britain and for a selfish cause which Woolf puts it all together by bringing the concept of Darwin’s theory which signifies “survival of the fittest” and moulding this concept with the flow by bringing a soft argument which Clarissa has over a lady who tries to convert into Christianity.

**Characters**

Sir William Bradshaw

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

Clarissa Dalloway

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

Elizabeth Dalloway

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

Richard Dalloway

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

Miss Kilman

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

Sally Seton

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

Lucrezia "Rezia" Warren Smith

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

Septimus Warren Smith

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

Peter Walsh

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

Hugh Whitbread

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