UNIT 14 : VIRGINIA WOOLF: *MRS DALLOWAY* I

UNIT STRUCTURE:

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- identify Virginia Woolf as an important writer of the 20th century
- discuss the life and works of Virginia Woolf
- situate the novel *Mrs Dalloway* in a specific literary context of the early twentieth century
- narrate the story of the novel in brief
- explain the overall significance of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* as a modern novel

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals mostly with the life and works of Virginia Woolf, one of the greatest modernist writers of recent times. The novel *Mrs Dalloway*, like the other novels prescribed for you in this course, is significant for a number of reasons. This unit will not only help you to consider the life-history of Virginia Woolf, but will also introduce you to the works she produced. Attempts have also been made to place *Mrs Dalloway* in a specific literary

and socio-historical background of the twentieth century of which Woolf was a part. This unit will hopefully enable you to understand the story of the novel in brief so that you find it easier to understand the various complex themes and issues implicit in the novel about which you will read in the next unit.



Virginia Woolf : She grew up with her two brothers and a sister. However, both Virginia and her sister was left to the care of several governesses.

14.3 VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE NOVELIST

This section deals with the life and works of Virginia Woolf. You are advised to read them thoroughly so that you can get a better grasp of the development of Virginia Woolf as a modernist writer.

14.3.1 Her Life

Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, 1882 to Leslie Stephen. Virginia proved her inclination towards a culture of learning by reflecting an early interest in languages, history and literature at a tender age. Her home in Hyde Park Gate in the Kensington section of London was known for its upper-class taboos and gossips. But, Virginia was fully aware of her neighbours and shared the same community feeling. From her childhood days Virginia had a deep liking for her brother Thoby and sister Vanessa. But, she also vied with Vanessa for the affection of Thoby. However, the intensity of her relation with Vanessa lasted throughout their whole lives. Vanessa later in her Notes on Virginia's Childhood wrote about the ability of producing sarcasm in Virginia Woolf from an early age.

Virginia was very conscious about people and relationships. The first combined literary effort of the Stephen brothers and sisters was their The Hyde Park Gate News, a small serial news paper in which they covered daily events, occasional announcements, caricatures and so on. Virginia and Thoby presented most of the writings while Vanessa did the illustrations. This paper also contained serial love stories which were of particular delight for Virginia. However, it was not their days spent at Hyde Park Gate but the summers spent at Talland House by the sea in Cornwall that Virginia

later remembered most.

However, the happiness of childhood met with an abrupt ending when her mother died on May 5, 1895. Subsequently, the fear of death was to haunt her throughout the whole life. After the demise of the mother, their half-sister Stella began to play the role of mother by tending to the household and taking care of the children. But Stella also died soon. In-between 1899-1904, Virginia found the opportunity to read voraciously. During that time, she read Macaulay, Pepys, Montaigne, Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Washington Irving, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt* and many more.

Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father also passed away on February 22, 1904. After his death, the depressed and grief-stricken children decided to move to Bloomsbury. Then Virginia exchanged several letters with her friends Emma and Violet whom she had met on her journey to Italy and Paris. The impression she gave of herself through those letters proved later to be of great help for her biographers. In those letters she was desperate and confused regarding her love for her father, as she was living a tragic life surrounded by the death of both her parents. Actually, it was also the beginning of her mental ill-health or 'madness' following which she tried many times to kill herself. Later, Vanessa called her back to their newly-built house at Gordon Square. During that time, Violet introduced her to Kathleen Lyttleton, the editor of the 'Women's Supplement' of the Guardian. Virginia began her work as a regular reviewer and writer of articles.



Once, her friend Violet took Virginia to her house at Burnham Wood where she tried to commit suicide by throwing herself out of the window. Although Virginia was not seriously hurt, her friend and relatives were now clear about her conditions.

The new house at Gordon Square proved to be a freedom from family constraints and the old patriarchy under which they had lived. In or about 1905 a group of friends, writers, artists and intellectuals began to meet at the Bloomsbury house of Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf. Its members included Woolf herself, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, G. E. Moore, Desmond MacCarthy, David Garnett, and Lady Ottoline

Morrell. The Bloomsbury Group provided new scope to ponder over new materials. On Thursday evenings, several topics were offered and discussed. It had a life-changing impact on Virginia.

On November 20, 1906, Virginia's brother Thoby died of typhoid. Thoby was her intellectual mentor after her father. The character of her brother comes alive as Jacob of *Jacob's Room* (1922). For several weeks after his demise, Virginia kept him alive still further through letters to her friend Violet who was also seriously ill.

In February, 1907, Clive and Vanessa got married. Since then Virginia led a more secluded life. She then started to write *Reminiscences*, an account of her sister Vanessa, which is part memoir, part biography, part paean. In some ways, it was her other attempt to recreate her sister as a full-grown fictional character. At the same time she was working on her novel, *The Voyage Out*. By 1910, the Bloomsbury Group could make its presence felt nationally. At the same time, Roger Fry astonished London audiences with the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Gallery.

In January, 1912, Leonard Woolf proposed marriage to Virginia. Their intimate friendship finally resulted in their marriage on August 12, 1912. Subsequently, Virginia's health started to deteriorate rapidly. Virginia made another attempt to commit suicide by taking more than 100 grains of Veronal, used as sleeping tablets. But, fortunately she was once again saved. After recovery, Virginia again started reading and writing her diary. Then in 1915, the couple decided to buy Hogarth House and a printing press that was to play a crucial role in the times to come. Moreover, the revelation of the doctors that she would not be able to become a mother further triggered more illness. On April 24, 1917, Virginia and Leonard's dream of owning a press became a reality. As Leonard had believed, it could give her something to concentrate on.

She made another suicidal attempt by drowning in the river Ouse, but escaped death. Finally, on March 28, 1941, Virginia left a suicide note for Vanessa and Leonard, put on her fur coat, took her

walking-stick, left towards the river, added stones to her pockets and drowned herself. Her dead body could not be found until on April 18, of the next month.



LET US KNOW

There are various views regarding her death. Some people suggest that Woolf's suicide resulted from an old madness which started to show its effect, and the terrified Woolf decided to commit suicide rather than suffer the same tortures of her former experience with mental illness. Some also opine that she failed to cope with contemporary war-ridden England with its terror of bombing as a part of World War II. Other still suggest that she was not willing to further burden her husband with her madness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: How was Virginia Woolf in her childhood?

Q2: Name the persons who influenced Virginia Woolf intellectually.

14.3.2 Her Works

In the previous section, you have read about the life of Virginia Woolf. This section will deal with some of her important fictional works.

Woolf completed her first novel *The Voyage Out* in 1912 but delaying publication until 1915. Her career continued with *Night and Day* (1919). She finished her third novel *Jacob's Room* by November, 2021. In 1922, she brought out the novel in which she claimed: "I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice." This novel is based on the life and death of her brother Thoby, and broke away from the realistic mode of her early writing. Like *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), it very well fulfils the purpose of fiction expressed

in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919): "Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." However, it is with *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931) that she finally established herself as a leading exponent of modernism.

Her next novel *Orlando* (1928) is a fantastic biography of an androgynous protagonist through her four centuries. This novel was dedicated to her friend Vita Sackville West. Following the success of the book Woolf was invited for lectures at Cambridge University. The papers that she delivered were compiled in *Women and Fiction*, later became *"A Room of One's Own"* which is today considered a famous feminist treatise. It was to address issues related to the position of a woman in a patriarchal society, her status in the family, her sexual life and so on.

Another biography *Flush* (1933) revolves around the pet spaniel of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Then, to free herself from depression, she turned to *The Years* (1937) in which she worked steadily on the role of the women and their sexual lives. Her last novel *was Between the Acts* published posthumously in 1941. This novel was completed just before the final attack of mental illness which drove her to suicide.

Virginia Woolf is now recognised as one of the major innovative novelists of the 20th century. She is best known for her use of Stream of Consciousness. Her works “A Room of One's Own” (1929), and “Three Guineas” (1938), are now established as feminist classics.



LET US KNOW

Virginia's career and sensibility as a writer and her attitude to modern fictions were also shaped by the World War I. Since, she also happened to be a part of the Bloomsbury Group, the literary and intellectual activities of the Group shaped her thinking mind to a great extent.

Bloomsbury for her was not just an intellectual community, but also an attitude to life and values, an intimacy amongst friends, marriages and much more.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Name some of the fictional works of Virginia Woolf.

Q 4: What is the significance of the “A Room of One's Own”?

14.4 CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL

The novel *Mrs Dalloway*, originally began as a short story entitled Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street. It was completed in October 1922, and published in 1923 in the American magazine *The Dial*. However, Virginia Woolf was also thinking of expanding it into a complete novel. This novel played an important role in British fictional modernism by exploring and asserting the relevance of certain very crucial and essential states of human sensitivity and intensity. In her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919), she stated that modern novelists should not choose to create plots, comedy, tragedy or catastrophe in the traditional sense. Again, in another essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1924) she insisted that the modern novel was a novel of character and she very whimsically claimed that by 1910, human nature had changed. It is against such intellectual contexts that a novel like *Mrs Dalloway* should be studied. *Mrs Dalloway* is 'modern' because of its sense of life, which can be experienced aesthetically. Perhaps this was also the dominant idea which she was trying to express through her other fictional works. This novel became well-known for its departure from earlier representations of reality and was never meant to be complete like the other realist novels. It can be placed in an age of changed relations and fractured connections.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: In what way is *Mrs Dalloway* a 'modern' novel? (60 words)

14.5 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

Clarissa Dalloway decided to buy the flowers for the party that evening herself. Lucy had so much other work to do and the morning air was fresh which always reminded her of a morning when she had been eighteen years old. Peter Walsh used to sit beside her and comment on vegetables. He still writes boring letters to her and would be returning from India someday. Clarissa thought of the noise that she heard over Westminster just before the clock Big Ben rang. She looked at the people around living their moments in London. It was June and the Great War (World War I) was over. Entering the park, she meets Hugh Whitbread, an old friend, who assures that he would attend the party even though his wife, Evelyn, was ill. The Whitbreads always came to London to see doctors. Though she adored Hugh Whitbread, he had a way of making Clarissa feel underdressed. Richard, her husband, could not stand Hugh and Peter also hated him.

Thinking of Peter again, she looked around and felt that he would have been lovely to walk with at this moment. She could not stop such thoughts and memories reminded her of Peter. Clarissa found herself (through memory again) arguing with Peter about why she could not marry him. She knew she was right about her decision, as he would not have given her any independence. But, his marriage with flimsy Indian woman also angered her greatly.

Clarissa knew not to define or label anyone because she felt at one with the world. She simply wanted to know people. Most of all, she loved living in the moment and was not irked by the thought of death. Clarissa felt that pieces of herself existed wherever she had ever been. Bond Street fascinated her a lot. Her daughter Elizabeth was not fascinated by any of the delicate gloves in the shops. Elizabeth was fascinated with Miss Kilman, a callous Communist who made one feel small because she was privately starving.

Clarissa was enraptured by the various smells and colours of the many flowers. Suddenly a pistol shot is heard in the street. The loud noise of a motorcar is also heard. Passers-by claimed to have seen the Prince or Queen through the window. The disturbance created by the car still remained

even after it had passed away. The street came to a stop and Septimus Warren Smith, a man of thirty, mentally and emotionally devastated by his experience in World War I, imagined that he was the cause of the stop and anticipated horror. His wife, Lucrezia (Rezia) could not help.

The people on Bond Street took a few moments to return to normal life. The car continued through Piccadilly. Meanwhile, a crowd formed at Buckingham's gates. Suddenly, Emily Coates, a woman watching the events, noticed an airplane making letters out of smoke. Roaming across London's sky, the plane's trail mystified its observers.

In Regent's Park, Rezia tried to show Septimus the letters in the sky since the doctor had suggested distracting him with things outside of himself. The beauty of the letters brought tears to his eyes. She walked to the fountain with a view to distract herself. She could tell no one about his state and felt alone. He was not the same man she had married. The doctor said nothing about what was wrong with him. Septimus sat, hearing the sparrows singing in Greek and babbling aloud. When Rezia returned, he jumped up, moving them away from the people and ignoring her.

Maisie Johnson, a girl from Edinburgh, asked the couple directions to the subway. Rezia replied abruptly, hoping Maisie would not notice Septimus' madness. Maisie was unnerved by both and would remember them for years. Mrs Carrie Dempster, an older woman in the park, noticed Maisie and was reminded of her younger days. She imagined Maisie getting married, asserting that she (Carrie) would have done things differently if she had a second chance. The plane continued aimlessly, and letters pouring from its looping motion.

Returning home, Clarissa felt as if she were a nun returning to her daily habit. She breathed in happily while Lucy stood by, hesitant. Noticing a note that read that Lady Bruton had requested Richard's company for lunch, Clarissa felt annoyed. Clarissa felt alone. She withdrew to the solitary attic room upstairs that she had occupied ever since her illness. There, she liked to read Baron Marbot's Memoirs. The room was cool with a white sheet stretched tightly across the narrow bed. She wondered if she had failed Richard and thought about her close connections with women, namely her old best

friend, Sally Seton. She knew what men feel toward the women with Sally.

She remembered Sally Saton and the way they had kissed one night. A moment later, Peter Walsh and Joseph, an old family friend, had intruded, perhaps purposefully, since Peter was prone to jealousy. Clarissa was horrified at the intrusion. Thinking of Peter, Clarissa (at present) wondered if he would think her older when he returned from India. She thought herself to be a good woman even if Lady Bruton had not invited her but Richard. Clarissa found her loveliest green dress and took it downstairs to mend. The doorbell rang and she heard the voice of a man demanding to see her. Abruptly, her door opened and she turned to hide her dress, as if she guarded her modesty.

Peter Walsh entered. Clarissa asked him if he remembered Bourton. But it reminded him of Clarissa's refusal to marry him. Clarissa too was caught in the wave of emotion. The memories brought Peter close to tears. He did not want to tell her about his new love Daisy because Clarissa would think him to be a failure. He felt that Clarissa had changed for the worse ever since marrying Richard. Clarissa asked about his life. There was too much to tell her, but he mentioned that he was in love with a girl in India who was still married to a Major in the Indian Army. He had come to London to see about a divorce.

Suddenly, Elizabeth entered. Clarissa said, "Here is my Elizabeth" Peter greeted her and rushed out of the door. Clarissa reminded him to not forget her party. Peter again thought of Elizabeth, thinking that she was a peculiar looking girl and probably did not get along with her mother. Smoking a cigar, he curled the smoke from his lips and decided to try to speak with Elizabeth alone that night. Then he fell into a deep sleep to dream of the gray nurse knitting beside Peter. As Peter dreams, the narrator reveals the symbolic story of a solitary traveler.

Clarissa approached Peter to introduce him to Richard. Peter retorted that she was the perfect hostess. After that the young people decided to go boating in the moonlight and they left Peter standing in the drawing room. Clarissa ran back inside to find Peter. He was suddenly happy. They walked down to the docks talking and, when the boat reached an island, they sat on the grass together.

Rezia realised that it was time to take Septimus to see Sir William Bradshaw, who might be able to help her. Septimus usually talks to himself, or to his friend Evans, who had died in the War. There were times when the couple was happy but then Septimus would mention killing himself, because, he explained, people were wicked. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. Holmes said that one was responsible for one's own health. Peter Walsh saw the unhappy couple. In the five years between 1918-1923, London had changed drastically. Respectable newspapers could write about bathrooms. Single women could put on make-up in public. Of all of Clarissa's old friends, Peter had always liked Sally best because she could see through the artificiality of the Whitbreads and Dalloways.

Then we are told about Septimus who had been one of the first volunteers for the army in World War I. He became friends with his officer, Evans, who died just before the war ended. Septimus was glad that he felt no grief over the death, until he realised that he had lost the ability to feel. In a panic, he married a young Italian girl, Lucrezia who liked his studiousness. The couple moved to London and Septimus returned to his post. He wondered if life lacked meaning. He read Shakespeare again and understood now that Shakespeare had despised love between man and woman. After five years of marriage, Lucrezia wanted to have a baby. Septimus, however, could not think of bringing a child into the world. Rezia became increasingly unhappy. But, Septimus too felt nothing when she wept. He wondered if he would go mad and, progressively, he did surrender to madness.

Septimus knew nothing was physically wrong with him. He felt nothing; he had married without love. The third time Holmes came to see him, Septimus refused him. Even though Septimus had talked of suicide, Holmes told him to shake off his depression. Septimus felt that Holmes, representative of human nature, was always after him. He hated Holmes and Rezia could not understand the reason. Without Rezia's support, Septimus felt deserted. He heard the world telling him to kill himself. One moment, he saw Evans, and cried out to him. Rezia entered his room, panicked, and called for Holmes. Upon seeing Holmes, Septimus screamed in horror. The doctor, annoyed, advised that they see Dr. Bradshaw.

The Warren Smiths went to visit Sir William Bradshaw. Rezia guessed his home because of the prestigious gray motorcar in front of the house. Bradshaw would often have to travel long distances to see rich country patients. Bradshaw earned his prestige through hard work. As Septimus walked in, Bradshaw knew immediately that Septimus had suffered a mental breakdown. He also recognised the great mistakes Dr. Holmes had made. In the short conversation Bradshaw had with Septimus, he learned that Septimus placed great importance on symbols. It did not detail the crimes to humanity that Septimus pictured he had committed. Bradshaw took Mrs Smith to a room nearby and asked if Septimus had spoken of killing himself. Embarrassed, she replied that he had. Bradshaw reassured her that Septimus needed a long rest in a country house to regain a sense of proportion.

When they returned to Septimus, Rezia burst out that he was ill and needed to go to a home. Septimus asked if it was a home of Dr. Holmes. Though slightly annoyed, Bradshaw assured him that it was his home. Septimus equated Bradshaw with Holmes and with the evil of human nature. Septimus wondered if he confessed his crimes, would they let him go. But, he could not remember his crimes. As the couple left, Bradshaw told Rezia he would take care of everything. Rezia felt angry and deserted. Bradshaw had given them his three-quarters of an hour and he had prescribed 'proportion' to straighten out Septimus. Yet, as the narrator explains, there is another side to 'proportion', termed conversion.



LET US KNOW

An inherent satire on the characters of Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw can be seen underlying in this novel. The doctors talking of reviving a necessary 'proportion' in society actually failed in curing Septimus.

The Smiths traveled up Harley Street. Around the same time, Hugh Whitbread passed a nearby clock. The narrator jumps to Hugh. Hugh was the type to delve into matters superficially. Still, he had been an honorable

member of high society for years. He was always impeccably dressed and maintained the best manners. Lady Bruton preferred Richard Dalloway to Hugh. She had invited both to lunch to ask for their services. Richard had a great respect for Lady Bruton, as she was the great grand-daughter of a General. Lady Bruton abruptly asked about Clarissa. Clarissa doubted that the Lady liked her, and it may have been true. Lady Bruton cared more for politics than people, and thought women caused their husbands to discard military posts. Suddenly, Lady Bruton mentioned that Peter Walsh was back in town. She was interested in seeing Richard's response. Richard thought that, when he returned home, he would tell Clarissa he loved her.

Richard and Hugh stood at a street corner, hoping to part but frozen in place. Finally, they decided to enter a shop. Richard had not cared about Canada and he did not care about the necklaces Hugh saw in the shop. He then remembered Clarissa and Peter and thought of buying Clarissa a gift. He bought Clarissa roses and rushed home to tell her that he loved her. He had not said it for years. Truly, he thought, it was a miracle that he had married her. Clarissa had told him that she had been right refusing Peter. She wanted support from him. He rushed through parks and past homeless women. He rushed by Buckingham Palace, full of prestige and tradition. Richard felt very happy, rushing home to profess his love for Clarissa.

Clarissa had purposely decided not to invite Ellie to the party as she was a bore. She was also annoyed that Elizabeth was praying with Miss Kilman. The clock struck three and Richard walked in, holding flowers. He could not bring himself to say he loved her, but she understood. Clarissa thanked him. Richard told her about Hugh being at lunch and being an ass, and Clarissa mentioned Peter's visit. Richard held her hand and then hurried off to some committee meeting. Before leaving, Richard told Clarissa to rest, as he always did, because a doctor once had suggested that she rest after lunch. Elizabeth and Miss Kilman were about to leave.

Desperate, Clarissa yelled after Elizabeth to remember her party, but Elizabeth did not hear. Clarissa hated how Miss Kilman wanted to convert everyone, and made others feel small. Clarissa simply wanted people to be themselves. She pondered over love and religion, feeling that the combination of the two had the power to destroy. She thought of Peter, who was filled with

knowledge of the world, but who loved flimsy women. Big Ben struck three-thirty. Clarissa noticed the old woman whom she could view in the house adjacent through her window. It seemed to Clarissa that the ringing of the bell forced the lady to move away from her window. All was connected. One needed neither religion nor love to make the connections. Another clock, which always rang slightly after Big Ben, reminded Clarissa to prepare for her party.

As Elizabeth looked for her gloves in the market, Miss Kilman desperately hoped the girl would stay with her longer. But, Elizabeth wanted to go. Miss Kilman detained her by saying that she had not finished eating. She asked Elizabeth if she would go to her mother's party. Elizabeth responded that she would probably have to, though she did not like parties. Miss Kilman replied that she never went to parties because she was never invited. She continued talking, feeling sorry for herself and driving a small wedge between herself and Elizabeth. Elizabeth then paid her bill and left. She had lost her Elizabeth. Clarissa had won, after all.

Elizabeth enjoyed the niceness of the day and decided to take a bus ride. Her life was changing. Already men were falling in love with her. She sat on the bus and enjoyed the fresh air. Meditating on Miss Kilman, she wondered if Miss Kilman's idea about the poor was correct. She paid another penny so that she could continue riding the bus onto the Strand, a working quarter of London. Miss Kilman had said that all professions were open to women of Elizabeth's generation, and so Elizabeth thought she might become a doctor, politician, or farmer. She was a lazy child, but the ride motivated her. The people in the Strand rushed about with such importance. Nearing St. Paul's cathedral, she knew it was getting late and she turned for home.

Septimus looked out his window and Rezia was tensed to see Septimus smile as he often did. Sometimes he would demand that she record his thoughts. Lately, he would suddenly cry out about truth and seeing his old friend, Evans. The doctors had said he should not get excited. He would speak of Holmes in terms of the evil of human nature. To Septimus, all this was true. This day, Rezia sat sewing a hat for Mrs Peters, a woman she did not like but who had been nice to them. Septimus watched Rezia's form and found it perfect. Septimus fell asleep, slowly slipping from reality. When he awoke, Rezia had gone out. Rezia burst in, still happy. She felt

that things had returned to normal.

Septimus believed that he could feel Rezia's mind, but he also remembered that Bradshaw had said that he would need to separate himself. It bothered him that Bradshaw had seemed so demanding. Rezia told him it was because he had wanted to kill himself. He inquired where his writings were and she brought them to him. He wanted them burnt but she promised to keep them from the doctors. She also promised that the doctors would not separate her from him. Septimus imagined his wife triumphing over the doctors. Rezia heard the voice of Dr. Holmes and ran to stop him from seeing Septimus. Holmes pushed by her. Rezia, Septimus knew, was on his side. Holmes continued up the stairs toward Septimus. Septimus tried to think of ways to escape. The window was the only option he could fathom. He waited to the last minute, enjoying the sun, and then threw himself onto the fence below. Slowly, she realised that Septimus was dead. People outside carried the body away.

Peter appreciated the ambulance that sped past him as a sign of civility and communal empathy. He thought back to a time when he and Clarissa rode on top of a bus, and she came up with a transcendental theory for how she knew people simply by living in a society. Peter did notice that her theory worked for their relationship. Memories of Clarissa would pop up anywhere. He would always feel bitterly that Clarissa had refused him, though he knew that their marriage would have failed. He thought of Daisy. Daisy was only twenty-four and had two young children. He decided that he would attend Clarissa's party, in order to ask Richard what the English government was planning to do in India.

Lucy and the other servants ran around for the final preparation for the party. They had heard that the Prime Minister too was coming. The invited guests were already arriving and the ladies began to move upstairs. Lucy reported to the others how lovely Elizabeth looked. A few servants were hired for Clarissa's parties every year. As the guests entered, they were each announced and Clarissa would say to each, "How delightful to see you!" Peter felt that Clarissa was insincere and wished he had gone somewhere else for the evening. Clarissa noticed Peter and felt ashamed. His presence made her judge herself. It angered Clarissa that Peter came

to criticise. And, yet, she thought her parties did matter.

Richard was kind enough to say hello. A moment later, Peter greeted Richard and they walked off. Clarissa continued greeting all who entered. Sally Saton was passing through London and came to the party, uninvited. Clarissa was overjoyed to see her. She noticed that Sally looked older; Sally told her that she had five boys. The presence of the The Prime Minister was announced and Clarissa had to attend to him. Surprisingly, he was an ordinary looking man. He walked about with Clarissa, then Richard, acting as a symbol of the English society. Peter thought the English were snobs. Soon, Peter spotted Hugh Whitbread, another reminder of the aristocratic society. Lady Bruton met privately with the Prime Minister. Then, Clarissa continued to lead the Prime Minister around, making him feel at ease.

Though intoxicated with the energy of her party, Clarissa retained a hollow feeling. As she grew older, parties were somewhat less fulfilling. She wished she could dance for the young people. Spotting her aunt, Clarissa went to old Helena Parry. She had gotten along so well with Peter, so Clarissa brought Peter to her. Clarissa promised Peter that they would speak later. Sally noticed Peter with Miss Parry. Clarissa hoped they would wait until she had time. She remembered Sally's vigor from youth, her insatiable vivacity. Sally could not illuminate a room as she once had. Settling down to a normal marriage was not expected of her, Clarissa thought. Sally sat with Peter. Clarissa saw them as the link to her past.

The Bradshaws entered and Clarissa hurried to greet them. Clarissa and Richard had never liked the couple. They were so late because, as Sir William had received a call about a young man who had killed himself. Clarissa was appalled that the Bradshaws were bringing 'death' into the party. Distraught, Clarissa wandered into a little room but no one was there. The thought of death overwhelmed her. She could feel for the man, who had been Septimus. She thought of her past, Peter, and Sally, and she wondered if the man had been happy.

Clarissa realised why she despised Sir Bradshaw; he made the life of his patients intolerable. The death seemed her disgrace, a fate into which she might have slipped if it had not been for Richard. He made her life happy, she thought. Clarissa looked out the window and noticed that the old woman

across was looking back toward her. Clarissa felt revived by the knowledge that Septimus had thrown his life away. She returned to the party, to find Peter and Sally. Richard stood talking to the Bradshaws before they left. Elizabeth caught his eye and wandered over to him. Richard was amazed how grown up she looked. Sally could tell that Elizabeth and Richard shared a special bond. Almost everyone had left the party now. Sally rose to speak with Richard. Peter waited a minute, soon overcome by great elation. He realised that he was happy because Clarissa had finally come.

Thus, the story of the novel Mrs Dalloway ends like this. It is one of the most complete, and ambiguous fictional representations of modern life. It is also Woolf's thorough experiment with the new technique of interior monologue. The novel plays subtly with the problem of identity which is both multiple and singular, both public and private, and more generally with human relationship. The meaning of the story lies in its complexity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Do you think that there is a clear cut story in this novel?

Q 7: What is the novel *Mrs Dalloway* all about?



14.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner is familiarised with Virginia Woolf who to her credit wrote nine novels, several feminist essays, the critical books, and the biography of Roger Fry, several periodical articles, the diaries, and the letters, most of which were published posthumously. All of them seem central to her time, her intellectual world, and modern artistic ideas. She is known mostly for her central position in the Bloomsbury Group, her feminist undertakings, her troubled married life, her lesbian tendencies, her essays on various contemporary topics, her ancestry and her beauty, her place and function in the Hogarth Press, her radicalism in terms of narrative forms and finally her contribution to literary modernism at the

beginning of the twentieth century. It was to cope with her pain of loss caused by the death of her parents, her aunt, and many of her family friends at a young stage, that she sought recourse to writing at an early age. *Mrs. Dalloway* is a representative novel of literary modernism and displays a sense of life, which can be experienced aesthetically.



14.7 FURTHER READING

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Websites :

www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/dalloway/fullsumm.html.



14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR ROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Virginia proved her inclination towards a culture of learning since her childhood. She was fully aware of their neighbours and shared the same community feeling. She had a deep liking for her brother Thoby and sister Vanessa the intensity of which lasted throughout their entire lives.

Ans to Q No 2: Woolf herself, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster, G. E. Moore, Desmond MacCarthy,

David Garnett, and Lady Ottoline Morrell.

Ans to Q No 3: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931), *Orlando* (1928) and so on.

Ans to Q No 4: "A Room of One's Own" is today considered a famous feminist treatise. It was to address issues related to the position of a woman in a patriarchal society, her status in the family, her sexual life and so on.

Ans to Q No 5: *Mrs Dalloway* is 'modern' because of its sense of life, which can be experienced aesthetically. It explores and asserts the relevance of certain very crucial and essential states of human sensitivity and intensity. It can be placed in an age of changed relations and fractured connections.

Ans to Q No 6: No, there is not a single story as such. Woolf did not divide the novel into chapters. This is common in other 'stream-of-consciousness' novels which deviate from the conventional norms of realism. This is a novel about 'psychological realism'. Hence, any division in terms of chapters and episodes was necessarily sought to be rejected.

Ans to Q No 7: The novel *Mrs Dalloway* is an experiment with the new technique of interior monologue. The novel plays subtly with the problem of identity which is both multiple and singular, public and private. It is a novel about the complexities in human relationship.



14.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1. Try to connect the various incidents in the life of Virginia Woolf and discuss how they helped in the formation of her novels?

Q 2. Do you think that a modern novel like *Mrs Dalloway* do not usually contain any clear-cut story? Discuss.

Q 3. Do you think that various incidents at home caused the mental illness of Virginia throughout her life?

Q 4. What idea do you receive regarding the characters presented through the novel?

Q 5. How are the little details of day-to-day life provided in the novel *Mrs Dalloway* ? Explain in your own words.

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