



Mrs. Dalloway

Virginia Woolf



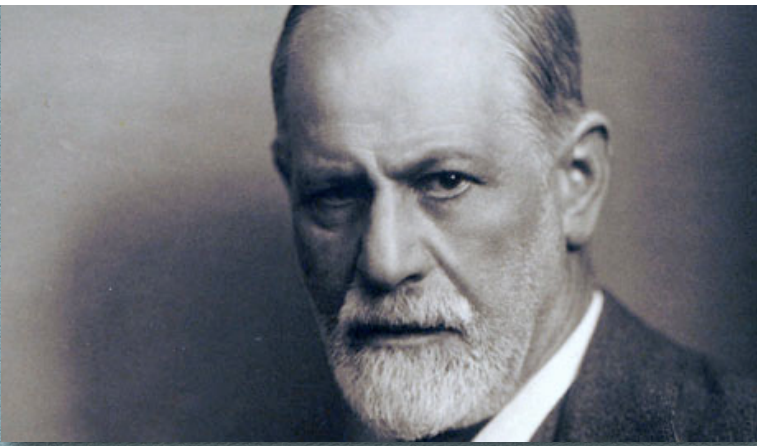
- ✻ Family Matters
- ✻ London & The Bloomsbury Group
- ✻ Leonard & Hogarth Press
- ✻ Women & Writing
- ✻ Depression & Suicide



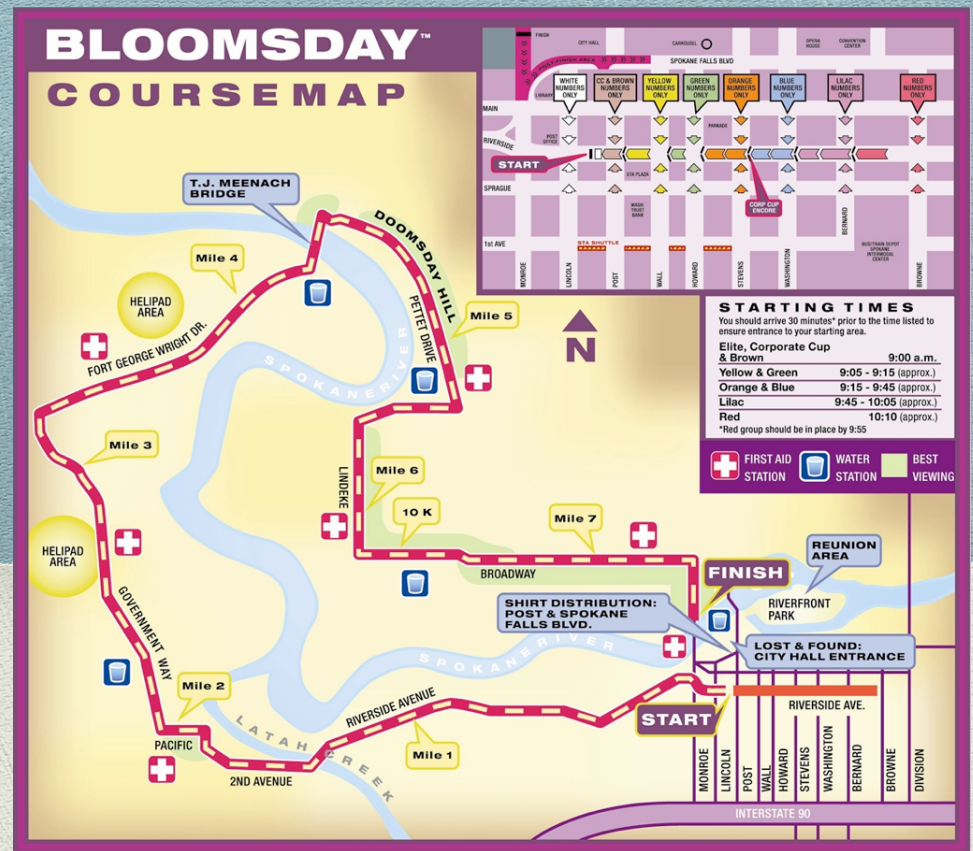
Virginia Woolf

1882 - 1941

Biographical Data



- ☼ Joyce, *Ulysses* and “The Dead”
- ☼ Eliot, *The Waste Land* & “Prufrock”
- ☼ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
- ☼ Freud & the subconscious

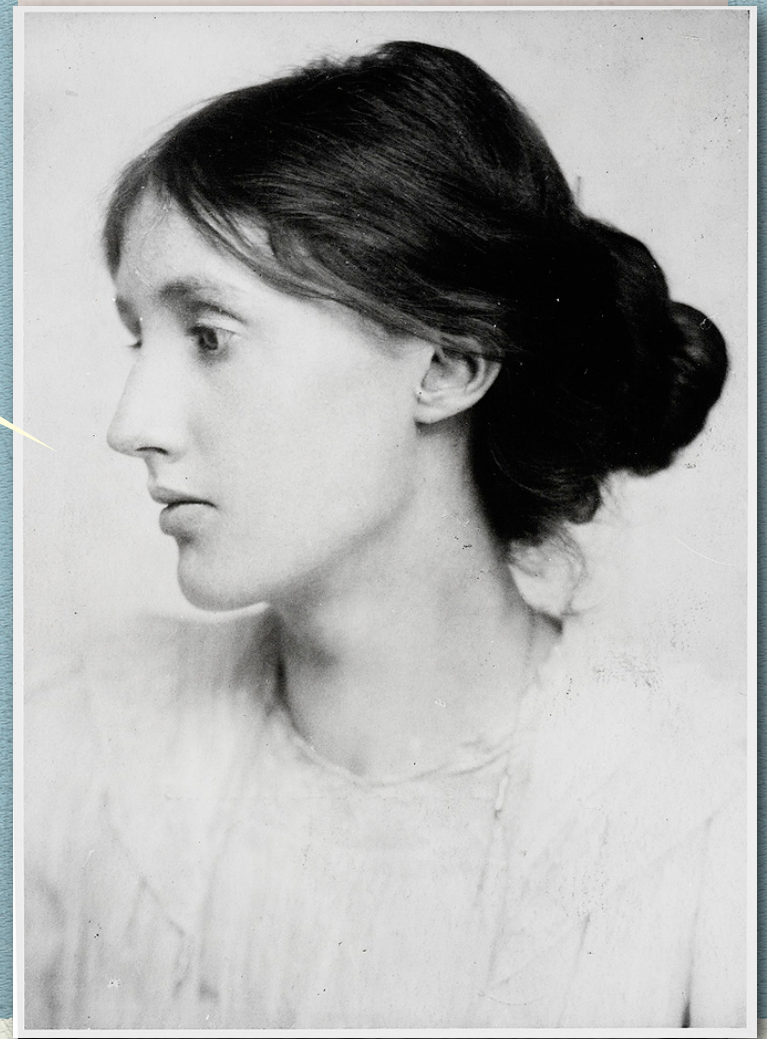


Influences

Write for 8 minutes; go ahead, get started. Just write, taking in every aspect of your consciousness. What are you aware of right now? Get going, Mr. Nigro will cue the time...

Preliminary Exercise

On the surface, *Mrs. Dalloway* is the story of a London woman who is planning a party on a June day in 1923. It is also the story of a troubled young man who has returned from the Great War. But the genius of the novel is not what lies on the surface, but what is *underneath* it...



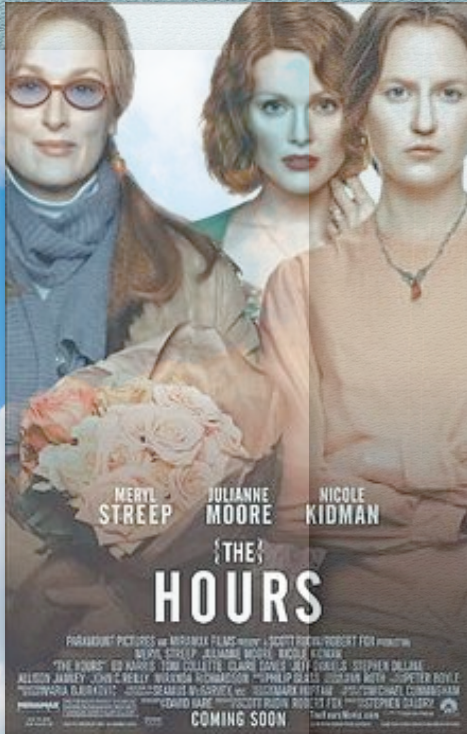
“Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of atoms, and as they fall...they shape themselves into the life of a Monday or Tuesday.... Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.”

"I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humor, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, and each comes to light at the present moment."

Mrs. Dalloway operates on three distinct levels of plot: physical, psychological, and metaphysical. Separating these will help us figure out exactly what is going on. To do this, it might be helpful to record events graphically. Often, we might notice the plot turn on a "hinge."



"What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air." (p. 3)



*Big Ben strikes the hour;
a car backfires;
a plane writes overhead...*

... these moments of shared experience often mark the intersection of the spacial and temporal worlds: the point of connection of the “beautiful caves.” Woolf referred to this method of characterization as her “tunneling process.”

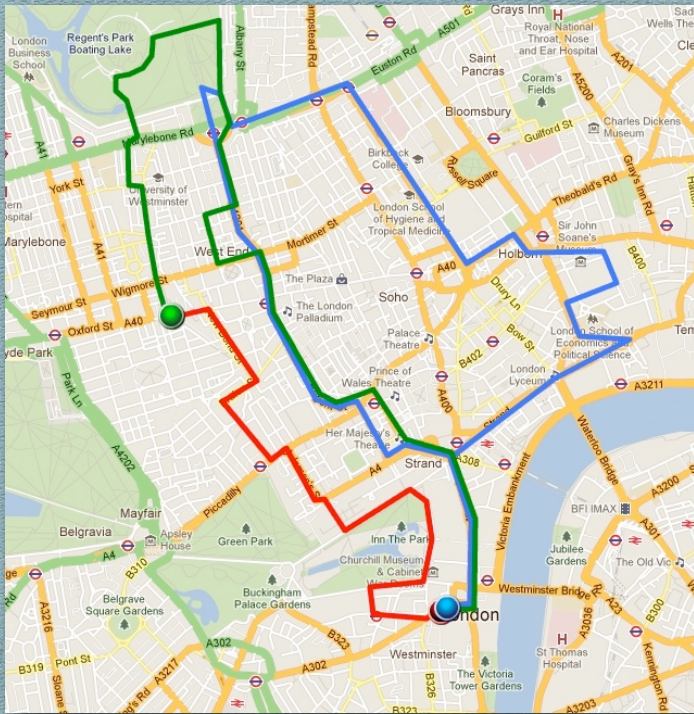
Woolf originally
titled this book
The Hours.
Why?

“hinges”

- ❁ What do we learn about Clarissa from her opening declaration?
- ❁ What are the various connotations of the word “plunge”?
- ❁ Why does Peter Walsh intrude into Clarissa’s thoughts?
- ❁ What do we learn about Clarissa from Scrope Purvis?
- ❁ What does Big Ben seem to mean to Clarissa? What is meant by “leaden circles dissolved in air”?
- ❁ What is Clarissa’s attitude toward the recently concluded war?
- ❁ Summarize Clarissa’s thoughts as she stands at the gates to St James Park.
- ❁ Why does Clarissa dislike Miss Kilman?
- ❁ What’s the significance of “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun”?

The last 3 questions
require a bit more
thought.





*“the hours” of
Mrs. Dalloway*

- ☼ 10:00-11:00 AM: Clarissa shopping; Septimus in the park
- ☼ 11:00-11:30 AM: Peter visits Clarissa
- ☼ 11:30-11:45 AM: Peter walks to the park
- ☼ 11:45-12:00 Noon: Septimus; Rezia; Peter
- ☼ 12:00 Noon-1:30 PM: Bradshaw’s consultation
- ☼ 1:30-3:00 PM: Lady Bruton’s lunch; Richard returns home
- ☼ 3:00-3:30 PM: Clarissa on Mrs. Kilman
- ☼ 3:30-6:00 PM: Mrs. Kilman & Elizabeth; Elizabeth’s journey; Septimus’ suicide
- ☼ 6:00 PM-until: Peter gets ready; Mrs. Dalloway’s party

Ugh. These literary types are so annoying.

She looks ridiculous in that hat.

Be nice to her, Virginia, and perhaps she'll go away.



Random fact that may interest only me:

Vivienne was committed to an asylum in 1938.

- ☼ Graphically organize the “tunnels” connecting the minds of individuals to (1) the backfiring of the car, and (2) the writing in the sky. Compare and contrast the varied reactions: do you see any patterns?
- ☼ Clarissa, miffed at not being invited to Lady Bruton’s luncheon, retreats to her attic room. Analyze her actions and relationships as she considers them to: Richard, Peter, Sally, and Lucy.



☼ Analyze the conversation between Peter and Clarissa. Notice how Woolf's style suggests larger ideas. What's going on with the knife and the scissors? What themes in *Mrs. Dalloway* are emerging?

☼ What does a close reading of Peter's thoughts during the chiming of St. Margaret's reveal?

- ❁ The question that was originally in this spot was poorly conceived and had to be deleted.
- ❁ What is Peter's problem with the way Clarissa had introduced Elizabeth to him?
- ❁ In what ways do the bells of St. Margaret's remind Peter of Clarissa?
- ❁ What is the significance of the solitary traveler interlude, and the song of the vagrant woman?
- ❁ What, exactly, has led to Septimus' condition?
- ❁ What is meant by "proportion" and "conversion"?
- ❁ How are Lady Bruton and Dr. Bradshaw similar?



1. Peter enjoys a cigar and falls asleep on a bench next to “an elderly grey nurse” in what famous London park?
2. What event involving Clarissa represents for Peter “the death of her soul”?
3. Who does Clarissa repeatedly introduce as “Wickham”?
4. What does Peter demand of Clarissa at their last meeting by the broken fountain at Bourton?
5. Who said “there was nothing the matter” with Septimus?
6. Who is “the dead man in the grey suit” that Septimus smiles at?
7. What was the “grudge” that Sally held against Hugh?
8. What does Bradshaw say the law requires of him regarding Septimus?
9. What reason does Bradshaw give for invoking this law?
10. Why does Lady Bruton invite Richard and Hugh to lunch?



Choose a passage or scene that provides the context for one of the previous ten questions. Examine the passage and make notes as if you were preparing to write a brief commentary on it. Consider:

- * Setting
- * Character
- * Plot
- * Diction & Tone
- * Structure
- * Theme



When you have made your notes, decide what is most important to the meaning of the text, make an outline, and draft a thesis for your commentary.

- ⦿ What are the “crimes” Septimus has committed and why can’t he recall them in front of Bradshaw?
- ⦿ Describe the relationship between Richard and Clarissa as it is revealed in the afternoon encounter.
- ⦿ Analyze the character of Miss Kilman. What is her role in the novel?
- ⦿ In what way is Elizabeth independent from the adults in her life?
- ⦿ How do you interpret the meaning of the last episode concerning Septimus?



- ✿ How does Peter react to receiving Clarissa's letter at the hotel?
- ✿ What do Peter and Clarissa think about each other when he arrives at her party?
- ✿ Why does Clarissa move on from talking with Sally? What's significant about this?
- ✿ What forces Clarissa's retreat to her upstairs room? What happens there that helps the reader to understand Clarissa's character?
- ✿ Consider the various symbolic elements present in the party scene and what they might mean.



I can't believe you came to my party with your collar sticking out like that, omg.

